



OUTLINES

An outline is a list of the topics covered in your essay. Many students find it just one more **time-consuming** step forced on them by their cruel instructors, so they usually write the outline *after* they write the essay. However, an outline is a **time-saving** tool that shows you visually--before you write--whether your essay will flow logically and be long enough to fulfill your instructor's page requirement.

An outline can help you focus your paper and can reveal the need for further expansion or limitation of your topic. Once you have taken a little time to generate an organized outline, your paper might almost write itself. It will be coherent and logical, clearly conveying your thoughts to be developed in your paper. If the outline is disorganized, your paper will likely be ineffective.

First, jot down as many ideas on your topic as possible without regard to order and later group related ideas together under major headings. Remember, an outline shows the *divisions* of your essay. Since you're dividing a larger topic, you'll obviously have to break it into at least two parts. This is why, for each supporting point, if you have an A, you must have a B listed.

Main ideas are designated by Roman numerals I, II, III, IV, V and so on. Supporting ideas branching off from the main idea are designated by capital letters A, B, C, D, etc. Subdivisions of these supporting ideas are marked by Arabic numerals 1, 2, 3, 4, etc. Minor ideas are designated by lower case letters a, b, c, etc. Once you complete your outline, you'll see which parts might be too skimpy: if you have only one detail to support your main heading, there's probably not enough information to turn that idea into a paragraph.

Outlines are usually developed in topic or sentence form:

Topic Outline: Use short phrases only, not full sentences.

Swimming is an excellent sport for senior citizens. (thesis)

- I. Pleasure
 - A. Relaxation
 - B. Competition
 - 1. Senior Olympics
 - 2. Water aerobics classes

- II. Health
 - A. Physical exercise
 - 1. Strengthens muscles
 - 2. Tones body
 - 3. Increases endurance
 - 4. Strengthens heart

- B. Mental alertness
 - 1. Relieves stress
 - 2. Retains youth
- III. Companionship
 - A. Activity done with others
 - B. Introduces new friends

Sentence Outline: Use sentences for headings/supporting ideas.

Swimming is an excellent sport for senior citizens. (thesis)

- I. It provides pleasure.
 - A. It is an enjoyable way to relax.
 - B. To compete with each other is exciting.
 - 1. Seniors can participate in Senior Olympics.
 - 2. They can compete in water aerobic classes.
- II. Swimming is a healthy exercise.
 - A. It helps keep the elderly physically fit.
 - 1. It strengthens muscles.
 - 2. It tones the body.
 - 3. It builds endurance.
 - 4. It strengthens the heart.
 - B. It increases mental alertness.
 - 1. The physical exertion helps relieve stress.
 - 2. Being more alert keeps the elderly younger longer.
- III. Meeting regularly provides seniors with companionship.
 - A. It is an organized activity with their peers.
 - B. It is a wonderful way to make new friends.

Sample Outline Format:

- I.
 - A.
 - 1.
 - a.
 - (1)
 - (a)
 - (b)
 - (2)
 - b.
 - 2.
 - B.
- II.

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