

# Preparing and Using Outlines

Using an outline can help you organize your material and can also help you discover connections between pieces of information that you weren't aware of when you first conceived the plan of your paper. It can also make you aware of material that is not really relevant to the purposes of your paper or material that you have covered before and should therefore be removed.

A **Working Outline** might be only an informal list of topics and subtopics which you are thinking of covering in your paper. Sometimes, however, an instructor might require that a working outline be submitted at the beginning of your work; then your instructor might suggest ways in which the work needs to be further developed or cut back. Your instructor might also see that you're trying to accomplish too much or too little for the scope of the assignment he or she has in mind. The working outline can be revised as you discover new material and get new ideas that ought to go into your paper. Most word processing programs have outlining features with automatic formatting that make it easy to create and revise outlines. It is a good idea to keep copies of old outlines in a computer folder in case new versions of the outline lead you in false directions that you will later have to abandon.

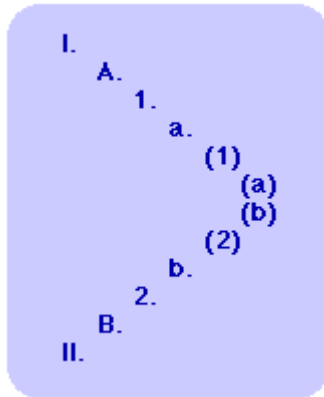
A **Final Outline** should enhance the organization and coherence of your research paper. Instructors sometimes require that a final outline be submitted along with the final version of your paper. Material that is not relevant to the purpose of your paper as revealed in your outline should be excised from the paper; if portions of your outline seem weak in comparison to others, more research may be required to create a sense of balance in your argument and presentation.

Outlines can be organized according to your purposes. Are you attempting to show the chronology of some historical development, the cause-and-effect relationship between one phenomenon and another, the process by which something is accomplished, or the logic of some position? Are you defining or analyzing something? Comparing or contrasting one thing to another? Presenting an argument (one side or both)?

In any case, try to bring related material together under general headings and arrange sections so they relate logically to each other. An effective introduction will map out the journey your reader is about to take, and a satisfactory conclusion will wrap up the sequence of ideas in a nice package.

A final outline can be written as a **topic outline**, in which you use only short phrases to suggest ideas, or as a **sentence outline**, in which you use full sentences (even very brief paragraphs) to show the development of ideas more fully. If your instructor requires an outline, follow consistently whichever plan he or she prefers.

*The MLA Handbook* suggests the following "descending parts of an outline":



Logic requires that if you have an "A" in your paper, you need to have a "B"; a "1" requires a "2," and so forth.

### Using the Library and Other Information Sources

- I. Introduction to the library
  - A. Programs of orientation and instruction
    - 1. Pamphlets, handbooks, other materials
    - 2. Orientation tours, lectures, courses.
  - B. Books about the library (cite examples)
- II. The central catalog or central information system
  - A. The online central catalog
    - 1. Definition and description
    - 2. Searching the online catalog
      - a. Searching by author, title, subject, keywords
      - b. Limiting the search
      - c. Using Boolean logic
        - (1) Definition of Boolean logic
        - (2) Examples of Boolean logic
    - 3. Information accessed from the online catalog
  - B. Information needed for research and writing
  - C. The card catalog and other catalogs
  - D. The central information system
- III. Reference works
  - A. Types of reference works
    - 1. Indexes
    - 2. Bibliographies
    - 3. Collections of abstracts
    - 4. Guides to research
    - 5. Dictionaries
    - 6. Encyclopedias
    - 7. Biographical sources
    - 8. Yearbooks
    - 9. Atlases
  - B. Publication forms of reference works
  - C. Searching a reference database
- IV. Location of library materials
  - A. Classification systems
    - 1. Dewey decimal system
    - 2. Library of Congress system
  - B. Main collection (open shelves, closed stacks)

..... and so forth. . .

Conclusion -- knowledge of the library and successful research papers.