

How to Outline

The most important thing about outlining is to get your thoughts down on paper so you don't forget them!

Don't worry about how your outline looks! Don't worry about making mistakes. You can fix anything later if need be.

- Start by jotting down any ideas that you have. Organize them if you can, but if you can't just focus on expanding on all your ideas and recording them.
- Organize your ideas by broader topics – draw different shapes around ideas that share a common or similar topic.
- Look at your similar ideas and derive main points from them.
- Be messy! Don't be afraid of getting anything wrong – a working outline is for *you* to use. You can always polish it up later if you need to turn in a copy of your outline.

There is no specific way of organizing a **draft** outline. Try what works for you! Some common approaches:

Formal Outlines

- Organized logically into subpoints and main points.

Example format:

Thesis Statement: _____
 I. Topic Sentence (introducing first main point)
 A. Subpoint 1
 B. Subpoint 2
 1. Details about subpoint 2
 2. Statistics and elaboration about subpoint 2
 C. Subpoint 3
 II. Topic sentence (introducing second main point)
 A. Subpoint 1
 1. Details about subpoint 1
 B. Subpoint 2

Informal list outlines

- All your ideas appear in one list, possibly unorganized.
- This approach lends itself to more train of thought type of brainstorming.
- You can start from main points and expand to subpoints or start with subpoints you know you want to mention and then fit them into main point categories later.

Example format:

Thesis Statement: _____
 Main point
 Statistic you want to include
 Subpoint
 Quote you want to use
 Another main point

Title
 I. Introduction
 II. Main Topic
 A. Subtopic
 1. key point
 2. key point
 a. detail
 b. detail
 B. Subtopic
 1. key point
 2. key point
 III. Main topic
 A. Subtopic
 1. key point
 2. key point
 IV. Conclusion

← **A final formal outline that follows this example is a good starting point for any paper.**

-Make sure your outline is *parallel*: Your main points and subpoints should be written the same way – for example, if one starts with a verb then they all should.

Make sure information in *each subtopic has the same significance* in your paper. For example, "a. detail" in the outline example should **not** be a broader statement than "2. Key point" which it is organized under. All corresponding levels of headings should have the same level of significance.



-Each main point should have at least 2 subtopics. Each Subtopic should have at least 2 key points.