

JOHNSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

THE OUTLINE

Why Outline?

- I. Outline to clarify or determine the purpose of the proposed writing.
- II. Outline to test organization--An outline provides an overview for the writing so flaws in the organization can be detected.
- III. Outline to complete communication--some assignments may require an outline as the final product. The outline will prove the student's mastery of the subject content.
- IV. Outline to take notes as a reading aid.

When material is complex, reducing it to outline form (1) forces the student to watch carefully what the author is doing and how he is doing it and (2) gives the student a concise review for future study. Follow these steps:

- A. Read the essay for a general impression. Note opening paragraphs and headings for a clue to the units or organization.
- B. Formulate the purpose of the chapter or reading and write a thesis.
- C. Determine the main divisions of the essay and mark them I, II, III, etc.
- D. Express the purpose of each major unit as a topic heading or subthesis. Test these headings to see if they logically develop the main purpose statement.
- E. Subdivide the main headings, if necessary, and mark these A, B, C, etc. If further subdivision is required, mark these 1,2,3, etc.
- F. Check the completed outline against the original essay or chapter to see that it adequately reveals its structure and content.

The Conventions of Outlining

Outlines should consist of three parts: the title, the purpose statement (focus or thesis), and the body of the outline. The body of the outline should never be

I. Introduction

II. Body

III. Conclusion

Such an outline gives no indication to the reader what is intended and is certainly no test to the organization of the paper.

The main divisions of the outline are represented by Roman numerals; their divisions, in turn, are marked by capital letters. Further subdivisions are indicated by Arabic numerals, small letters, Arabic numerals in parentheses, and small letters in parentheses. These symbols follow a progressive system of indentation so that the relation and relative importance of topics may be seen at a glance.

Title

Thesis (purpose statement of focus)

I.

A.

1.

a.

(1)

(a)

(b)

b.

c.

2.

3.

B.

1.

2.

II.

A.

B.

C.

Do not confuse the different levels of division by putting main headings as subheadings or vice versa.

Example:

WRONG: I. The Executive
 A. The President
 B. The Supreme Court
II. The Legislature
 A. The House of Representatives
 B. The Senate

WRONG: I. The Legislature
II. The Senate
III. The President
IV. The Judiciary

CORRECT:

The Divisions of Federal Authority

Thesis (focus): To show the main divisions of the federal government.

I. The Executive
 A. The President
 B. The Cabinet
 C. Appointed authorities
II. The Legislative
 A. The House of Representatives
 B. The Senate
III. The Judiciary
 A. The Federal Courts
 B. The Supreme Court

The formal outline will use either topic or sentence headings.

1. The topic outline uses single words or phrases (example above).
2. The sentence outline uses complete sentences (as in the example outline on the superior student).

The important point to remember is consistency and parallelism among the points on the outline. If the writer begins in topics, he must continue this form all the way through the outline. If he begins with a sentence, the sentences must be used throughout the outline. Each topic or sentence should also be parallel. In other words, the wording in each division should be in the same grammatical construction. Consistency of grammatical form emphasizes the logic of the outline

and gives it clarity and smoothness. Inconsistency of form, on the other hand, makes a perfectly rational ordering of items seem illogical.

Nonparallel

THE GAME OF TENNIS

- I. The playing court
 - A. The surface materials for it
 - 1. Made of clay
 - 2. Grass
 - 3. The asphalt type
 - B. Measuring the court
 - 1. For singles
 - 2. Doubles
 - C. Net
 - D. Backstops necessary
- II. Equipment needed
 - A. Racket
 - B. The tennis balls
 - C. The wearing apparel of players
- III. Rules for playing tennis
 - A. The game of singles
 - B. Doubles
- IV. Principal strokes of tennis
 - A. Serving the ball
 - B. The forehand
 - 1. Drive
 - 2. Lobbing the ball
 - C. The backhand stroke
 - 1. The drive
 - 2. Lob

Parallel

THE GAME OF TENNIS

- I. Playing court
 - A. Surface materials
 - 1. Clay
 - 2. Grass
 - 3. Asphalt
 - B. Measurements
 - 1. Singles
 - 2. Doubles
 - C. Net
 - D. Backstops
- II Equipment
 - A. Racket
 - B. Ball
 - C. Wearing apparel
- III. Playing rules
 - A. Singles
 - B. Doubles
- IV. Principal strokes
 - A. Serving stroke
 - B. Forehand stroke
 - 1. Drive
 - 2. Lob
 - C. Backhand stroke
 - 1. Drive
 - 2. Lob

Make sure the outline is sound by asking the following questions which will test the outline and the proposed essay.

Testing the Outline

1. Is the thesis or purpose statement satisfactory?

Example of an unsatisfactory thesis statement and outline which will lead to a purposeless paper:

Thesis statement: The purpose of this paper is to provide a better understanding of the American Indian by revealing a few facts about his everyday life and customs.

- I. The Indian religion differs from the white man's.
 - A. The Indian religion is complicated.
 - B. His conception of the supernatural has a strong influence on his everyday life.
- II. The Indian medicine man is one of the most important people in the tribe.
 - A. The training of the medicine man begins at an early age.
- III. Dancing is of great importance in the life of the Indian.
 - A. There are many classes of dancing.
 - B. The instruments used to accompany the dancers are of a wide variation.
- IV. The education of the Indian was not very extensive.
 - A. There were several Indian colleges built.
- V. The government of the Indian was simple.
 - A. There were four divisions in the government.

2. Is there a clear relationship among the parts of the outline?

An example of an outline which will help produce a paper that is coherent and closely reasoned:

Thesis: The age at which a citizen may vote should be reduced to 18.

- I. The present age limit has no logical justification.
 - A. It has no relation to physical maturity.
 - B. It has no relation to intellectual maturity.
 - C. It has no relation to economic maturity.
- II. Whatever justification the present age limit once had has been removed by changed conditions.
 - A. In the last war we were forced to draft 18-year-olds because they made the best soldiers.
 - B. The draft necessitates a change in the voting age if we are to respect the political maxim that the responsibilities of citizenship presuppose the privileges of citizenship.
- III. The objections against reducing the age limit, like the objections against female suffrage, are based on unsupported assertions.
 - A. It was asserted that women would use the vote foolishly, but the facts have disproved that assertion.
 - B. It is asserted that 18-year-olds neither care about voting nor will take the trouble to make themselves politically informed, but the facts do not support that assertion.
- IV. The argument that there has to be some minimum age begs the question, since reducing the age limit does not abolish it.
- V. Reducing the age limit would broaden the base of our democracy, a consequence which has been traditionally desirable.

3. Is the outline sufficiently developed?

Every entry in an outline should be adequately developed, and no entry should appear unless the author intends to develop it. If an outline is a blueprint for a paper, it must be detailed enough to be really useful.

One of the ways to assemble outlines is to make a list of characteristics, points, causes and/or effects, details, steps, time elements, etc. (in other words, similar pieces of information). Having a clear purpose of what you want to do or say in the paper will help you to organize the facts you have assembled. The purpose will also help you to have a plan or mode for your organization. For instance, if the information is a time sequence, you will want to arrange the information chronologically (narrative mode). If the information is steps in a process, you will put the steps in the order in which they should be executed (process analysis). If you will be describing someone or something, the details should be arranged in a consistent order by space (descriptive mode). The type of support you will be using to develop your paper may determine mode such as example/illustration, comparison/contrast, definition, or classification. **The order in which you may place the information will be one of the following:**

1. Most important to least important or least important to most important
2. Lesser known to greater known fact or greater known to lesser known fact
3. The particular to general (inductive) or the general to particular (deductive)
4. Question/answer
5. Causes and effects or cause-effect, cause-effect, cause-effect

Aim and audience should also be taken into consideration as you prepare to organize your outline.

Expressive aim allows the writer to express his/her knowledge and/or experiences as support for the thesis (focus).

Persuasive aim requires the writer to use all support to convince the audience to see his/her viewpoint.

Informative aim permits the writer to enlighten his/her audience on a particular subject.

EXAMPLE:

Suppose you are asked to write a term paper on the characteristics of superior college students. Assume that you have done the necessary reading and have acquired a collection of notes, including statistical evidence, case histories, academic and professional records of superior students, and comparisons of superior and inferior students. As you study these notes (grouping similar kinds of information together), you decide that superior college students show certain characteristics, which you list as follows:

1. They make a rapid survey before reading a chapter.
2. They associate what they learn in one course with work in another.
3. They study alone.
4. They tend to be non-social.
5. They are more introverted than other students.
6. They notice the headings in the textbooks.
7. They are more self-conscious than other students.
8. They are younger than most students.
9. They are relatively indifferent to the opposite sex.
10. They are less assertive, but more independent.
11. They take a slightly lighter schedule.
12. They are persistent.
13. They recite to themselves.
14. They clear up any point they do not understand before going on to another.
15. They spend a little more time than the average in study.
16. They are happy in college.
17. They participate in more extracurricular activities, but mostly in clubs in which the interest is intellectual rather than social.
18. They usually have abilities necessary for success in their chosen profession.

You may group the characteristics under topic headings such as:

1. Study habits
2. Age
3. Personality traits
4. Social characteristics

There is not enough information for age or social characteristics, so you can set up the two dominant headings--study habits and personality traits--as your main ideas.

Personality traits

non-social introvertive self-conscious indifferent to opposite sex
 persistent less assertive more independent
 (?) participate in more extracurricular activities, but of intellectual type

Study habits

spend more time on studies study alone
 make rapid survey before reading
 clear up one point before moving on to another
 associate what they learn in one course with what they learn in another
 take slightly lighter schedules
 notice headings of textbooks
 recite to themselves

The outline might look like this:

Thesis: Superior college students are better adjusted to their academic than to their social environment.

- I. They are well adjusted to their academic environment.
 - A. They have efficient study habits,
 - B. They supplement their class work with intellectual extracurricular activities.
 - C. They are happy in college.

- II. They are less well adjusted to their social environment.
 - A. They are introverted and self-conscious.
 - B. They are non-social.
 - C. They are relatively indifferent to the opposite sex.

Practice Exercise A

Fit the following statements into their appropriate place in the framework that follows and supply statements for *I* and *II*. Since the order of statements under *I* and *II* may vary, put first the statement which has the lowest number. Thus, the statements under *I* should be arranged with the first appropriate statement opposite *A*, the next opposite *B*, and so on.

1. Speed of air travel is its major advantage.
2. Fear has been the greatest deterrent to passenger travel by air.
3. Time and cost to airport is another deterrent.
4. Frequency of service has stimulated growth.
5. Advance reservations have been a drawback.
6. Baggage limitation is an inconvenience to commercial travelers.
7. There is a probable saving in the cost of air travel.
8. airsickness and other discomforts are still prevalent to some degree.
9. Cancellations of flights are still too high to satisfy the traveling public.

Thesis: The growth of air passenger travel has been affected by both favorable and adverse factors.

I.

A.

B.

C.

II.

A.

B.

C.

D.

E.

F.

Practice Exercise B

Study the following outlines. Are they consistently organized? Do you find any single headings or subheadings? Are all items in parallel grammatical construction? Revise each outline so that it will be consistent with the principles of outlining.

THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF A CITY UNIVERSITY

I. Convenience of location

A. Transportation

B. Hotels

C. People

D. Stores

E. Theaters

II. Advantages

- A. Center of travel
- B. Students learn to be more independent
- C. More types of people
- D. Those who have never been in city get new view
- E. Opportunities for work

III. Disadvantages

- A. Tendency to become too interested in other things
- B. Too much for some to cope with
- C. Too close to other schools

THE VALUE OF PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

I. Introduction

- A. Operation of public opinion polls
 1. Selection of an important issue
 2. Constructing a set of questions
 - a. Scientific nature of this construction
 3. A cross section of the population is selected
- B. Importance of polls' results
 1. Attitudes of public revealed to lawmakers
 2. Power of present groups revealed

3. Polls are a democratic process

- a. Polls reveal extent of people's knowledge

BAKING YOUR OWN BREAD

I. Introduction--Delicious taste, look, and feel of good bread

II. Breadmaking in the past

- A. More difficult than now
- B. Necessary to make own yeast
- C. Kneading difficult

III. Breadmaking today is popular

- A. Much easier
 - 1. Can make a few loaves at a time
 - 2. Gas and electric ovens easier to control
- B. Making bread is enjoyable
 - 1. Sense of satisfaction in kneading own dough
 - 2. Bread baking in oven smells good
 - 3. More tasty than most bought breads

IV. Three easy recipes

- A. White-flour bread
- B. Sweetened breads
 - 1. Raisin

V. Conclusion--Pleasure of sitting down to eat a slice of your own baked bread.

Practice Exercise C

The purpose statement and Roman numerals of an outline are given, as well as statements that comprise the capital letters and Arabic numerals. From these sets of data, reconstruct the complete outline. Some statements could fit under *I* or *II* or both, and you will decide how you will place them.

The purpose of my paper is to reveal what plastic surgeons are doing to restore function and improve the appearance of scarred and wounded veterans of World War II.

- I. The primary aim of the plastic surgeon is to restore function.
- II. The plastic surgeon is also wants to improve the appearance of scarred and wounded veterans.
 1. The hands and arms are among the first portions of the body to be restored.
 2. The plastic surgeon can rebuild an entire new face for the patient.
 3. Noses are rebuilt to enable patients to breathe and to improve appearance.
 4. New eyelids are made to protect eyes.
 5. Leg and arm stumps may be made healthy before artificial limbs are applied.
 6. Scars that made veterans hideous are removed.
 7. Patients are restored to their former likeness as nearly as possible.
 8. Ears are restored by plastic surgery.
 9. New tendons are put into fingers so they can move.
 10. Skin grafts are done on burns that are too noticeable.
 11. Thumb and forefinger are most important to save so hand can function.
 12. Lower jaws are rebuilt so that veteran can eat, drink, and speak naturally.
 13. Entire forearms are rebuilt by plastic surgery.
 14. Scars that are opened and undermined, and sewed together, heal without scarring.
 15. Hands are most important for veteran to help himself.
 16. Surgeons connect tissue to paralyzed area to heal it almost without a defect.