

Outlines

Some people can write a paper from top to bottom without a plan or an outline, but it's rare. If you're one of those people who need an outline, try using the tips in this handout.

Outlines:

- Organize your paper *before you write* it, so you know that your topics and ideas flow well, follow your thesis, and you have solid research to back up every claim you make.
- It's the skeleton of your paper, to make sure you have a solid bone structure before you begin to build up the muscle (main points), connective tissue (evidence), and beautiful skin (language/writing style).

Introduction:

Your introduction should include an attention grabber, the topic of your paper, the specific issue you're addressing, and your thesis.

Paragraphs:

Each paragraph should include a topic sentence, which should follow the order of your thesis, subtopics of the main topic, and supporting evidence you've found in your research.

Conclusion:

Your conclusion should tell your readers how the evidence you've presented proves your thesis, then find an application for the field of study or life, and then move into broader information to gently draw the reader out.

Mistake:

Some students make their References page or Works Cited page the final step in their writing process.

Instead, build your references page as you're doing your research and building your outline, so you're not scrambling to remember where you found something or who wrote it when you're writing your paper and building your citations. It's much easier to remove a reference you don't use than it is to search again for one you've already used but can't remember where you found it.

Sample Outline:

Title

- I. Introduction:
 - a. Topic: broad idea of paper
 - b. Issue: What specifically am I talking about?
 - c. Thesis: What is my point, argument, or specific stance?
- II. Topic sentence (new paragraph)
 - a. Subtopic
 - i. Supporting evidence
 - ii. analysis
 - b. Subtopic
 - i. Supporting evidence
 - ii. analysis
- III. Topic sentence (new paragraph)
 - a. Subtopic
 - i. Supporting evidence
 - ii. analysis
 - b. Subtopic
 - i. Supporting evidence
 - ii. analysis
- IV. Conclusion
 - a. This is how my evidence proves my thesis
 - b. Application to field of study/life
 - c. Move into general information
- V. References