

# Outlines

## What is an outline?

An outline is a plan using headings and subdivisions to clarify and show connections between the main points of a paper. It is a helpful tool for organizing thoughts, arguments, and research data.

## When writing an outline, keep these points in mind:

- Put the thesis at the top (*What is your paper going to be about (topic) and what is your point of view or argument?*)
- Convert your notes into an outline by grouping them into categories or topics.
- Arrange the reasons and support for your argument in a logical order, for example:
  - from earliest to latest
  - from most general to most technical
  - from least convincing to most convincing
  - from least important to most important
- To show a new topic, make sure each level is indented
- With each new topic, example, and detail, your ideas should get more specific
- If you have an A, you need a B; if you have a 1, you need a 2.

## Outline Format

An outline indicates the order in which you will present your ideas and the relationship of the main ideas to the supporting details. Be sure your points are in the exact order you plan to discuss them in your paper:

- I. Introduction and thesis
- II. First major topic of your paper
  - A. First secondary topic
  - B. Next secondary topic
    - 1. supporting example
    - 2. supporting example
      - a. first specific detail
      - b. next specific detail
- III. Next major topic of your paper

## Sample Topic or Sentence Outline

An outline may list topics (or ideas) to be covered in your writing in words and phrases or, as in a sentence outline, in complete sentences. For example:

- I. Introduction with the thesis: Acid rain will become the most dangerous result of air pollution if efforts are not made to limit its causes.
- II. Questions to be considered: What is acid rain? What causes it? What are its environmental effects? How can it be stopped?
  - A. Definition of acid rain
  - B. Causes of acid rain
    - 1. Coal-burning power plants
    - 2. Automobile pollution
  - C. Effects of acid rain
    - 1. Deforestation in New England
      - a. the White Mountain study
      - b. maple trees dying in Vermont
    - 2. Dead trees
      - a. fire danger
      - b. erosion