

# How to Write an Outline

During your college career, you will need to learn one important study tactic: outlining. This will help you take better notes and study more effectively. Some professors even require outlines before rough drafts of important research papers and other writing assignments. So it is better if you are familiar with the basic concept of outlining so that you will be successful at note taking and studying during your college years.

## What Does an Outline Do?

An outline basically “lays out” your notes, thoughts and information in a hierarchical style. Outlines are usually used to help a student organize their thoughts and their notes before writing an essay or research paper. By outlining before you write, you will find that your paper is easier to write and will flow better.

## THESIS

Your thesis or main idea should be the first section of your outline. Since the thesis is usually the introductory paragraph of your paper, it only makes sense that it comes first in your outline. By having your thesis first, you can use this to build main points for your paper.

## POINTS/IDEAS

You will need main points and ideas that support your thesis. These will come in the next section of your outline. If you are writing an argumentative paper then your argumentative points would go in this section. If you are defending your thesis, you would put all of the reasons in this section as well. This is usually the middle or the “chunk” of your outline, which ultimately will be the bulk of your paper as well.

## CONCLUSIONS

Usually you will end your paper with a closing paragraph. This usually sums up your thesis, and ties in all your main ideas. In this paragraph you would bring the whole paper together. This is usually the last section of your outline.

## How to Construct the Outline

Each section listed above should be labeled with a Roman numeral, ie: I, II, III, IV etc. Each sub-category within each section should be given a capital letter, ie: A, B, C, D etc. The ideas and points in the sub-category should use numbers ie: 1, 2, 3, 4 etc. Any points after that should use lower case letters, ie: a, b, c, d.

## EXAMPLE OUTLINE

- I. THESIS
- II. Section 1
  - A. Point made
  - B. Another point made
    - 1. supports the point made above
      - a. additional support

## TIPS

- Try to keep your outline logical and in order. This will help you construct your paper in a way that makes sense and will help it flow nicer.

- Keep your outlines for reference in the future. Use them as a study guide for tests.

- If you need help developing an outline for a research paper, check with your college or university tutoring or writing center. There you can obtain assistance in writing your outline.

Remember, an efficient well planned outline will make for an easy to write paper.