## **Creating an Outline**

## What is an outline?

An outline is defined by Webster's Dictionary as a preliminary draft or plan. An outline combines a thesis with research, from which a writer can create a unified essay. Think of an outline as a road map. Writers need to know which way they are traveling before the trip begins!

## What are some of the benefits of using an outline?

- Provides structure and direction for a written piece
- Establishes order of main points
- Points out areas that need to be developed
- Gives confidence to the writer—having a plan helps!



## How is an outline created?

1. Ask yourself...

What is the topic that I will be writing about? What is my thesis statement?

- 2. Create an interesting title that relates to your thesis statement. Begin your outline with this title. (This can be written later in the process also)
- 3. **Choose the type of outline to be used.** If an outline is required for an assignment, you will usually have to complete a Formal outline. However, starting with an Informal outline and then proceeding to a Working outline can be a good way to help you to start thinking about your topic.
  - a. Informal—List of main points
  - b. Working— List of main points, according to importance, along with some supporting details
  - c. Formal— List of main points and supporting details, according to importance, shown with indentations, numbers, and letters
  - \* See reverse for sample outlines.
- 4. Identify main ideas that support your thesis.
- 5. Provide at least two details (or pieces of evidence) for each main idea.
- 6. When finished, ask yourself:

Does my evidence support my thesis?

Does the order of the ideas in my outline make sense?

Is each main idea supported with two or more details?

Do any of my main ideas need additional evidence?

Are any of my main ideas repetitive?

7. Start writing by using your outline as a road map! But remember, your outline should be flexible; make changes as needed!

	Informal Outline	Working Outline	Formal Outline
Definition	Proposed main ideas are	Main ideas are listed	Main ideas and supporting details
	listed	using a hierarchy of	are organized using a hierarchy,
		importance, often using	shown by indentations, numbers,
		indentations to indicate	and letters. Thesis statement is
		supporting details	included.
Structure		First main idea	Thesis Statement
	1. Idea	Supporting evidence or	I. First reason
	2. Idea	detail	A. Supporting evidence
	3. Idea	Supporting evidence or	1. Detail of evidence
		detail	2. Detail of evidence
		Second Main Idea	B. Supporting Evidence
		Supporting evidence or	II. Second Reason
		detail	A. Supporting evidence
		Supporting evidence or	1. Detail of evidence
		detail	2. Detail of evidence
Sample	Benefits of Homeschooling	Benefits of Homeschooling	Benefits of Homeschooling
Outline	1. Choice according to	Choice in Curriculum	Homeschooling allows for freedom in
	lesson topics and	Variety of subjects	the classroom.
	duration	Flexibility in duration	
	2. Allows frequent field	of lessons and units	1. Choice in Curriculum A. Flexibility in subject matter
	trips	Choice in Location	1. Student interests
		Take field trips	2. Freedom from standards
	iaio	Educational vacations	B. Duration of lessons
			II. Choice in Location

Information on this handout adapted from:

Bullock, Richard. The Norton Field Guide to Writing. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.

"Using Outlines" Writing Tutorial Services. 2004. Indiana University http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/outlines.shtml