



DEVELOPING AN OUTLINE

An outline is:

- A logical, general description
- A schematic summary
- An organizational pattern with correct classification
- A visual and conceptual design of your writing

Purpose

Generally, it aids you in the process of writing.

Particularly:

- Helps organize your ideas
- Presents your material in a logical form
- Shows the relationship of ideas in your writing
- Constructs an ordered overview of your writing
- Defines boundaries and groups

Process

Before you begin:

- Determine the **purpose** of your paper
- Determine the **thesis** of your paper
- Determine the **audience** you are writing for

Then:

- **Brainstorm** – List all the ideas you want to include in this writing.
- **Organize** – Group ideas together that are related to each other.
- **Order** – Divide this material into groups arranging the general to the specific, or from abstract to concrete.
- **Label** – Create main and subtopic headings and write coordinate levels in parallel form.

Theory

An outline has a balanced structure which uses the principles of:

- Parallelism
- Coordination
- Subordination
- Division

Parallelism

Whenever possible, in writing an outline, **coordinate heads** should be expressed in parallel form. That is, nouns should be made parallel with nouns, verb forms with verb forms, adjectives with adjectives, and so on. (Example: nouns – computers, programs, experienced users) Although parallel structure is desired, logical and clear writing should not be sacrificed simply to maintain parallelism. For example, there are times when nouns and gerunds used at the same level of an outline are acceptable. Reasonableness and flexibility of form is preferred to rigidity.

Coordination

In outlining, those items which are of equal significance have comparable numeral or letter designations; an A is equal a B, a 1 to a 2, as a to a b, etc. Coordinates should be seen as “having the same value.” Coordination is a principle that enables the writer to maintain a coherent and consistent documentation.

Correct coordination

- A. Word processing programs
- B. Data base programs
- C. Spreadsheet programs

Incorrect coordination

Word processing programs

- A. Wordstar
- B. Thinktank

Explanation: Wordstar is a type of word processing program and should be treated as subdivision. Thinktank is a type of organizational program. One way to correct coordination would be:

- A. Types of programs
 - 1. Wordstar
 - 2. Thinktank
- B. Evaluation of programs
 - 1. Wordstar
 - 2. Thinktank

Subordination

In order to indicate relevance, that is levels of significance, an outline uses major and minor heading. Thus in ordering ideas you should organize material from general to specific or from abstract to concrete – the more general or abstract the concept, the higher the level or rank in the outline. This principle allows your material to be ordered in terms of logical and requires a clear articulation of the relationship between component parts in the outline. Subdivisions of a major division should always have the same relationship to the world.

Correct subordination

- A. Word processing programs
 - 1. Applewriter
 - 2. Wordstar
- B. Thought processors
 - 1. Thinktank
 - 2. THOR

Faulty subordination

- A. Word processing programs
 - 1. Applewriter
 - 2. Useful
 - 3. Obsolete

Explanation: There is an A without a B. Also, 1, 2, 3 are not equal; Applewriter is a type of word processing program, and useful and obsolete are qualities. To correct this faulty subordination:

- A. Applewriter
 - 1. Positive features
 - 2. Negative features
- C. Wordstar
 - 1. Positive features
 - 2. Negative features

Division

To divide, you always need at least **two** parts; there can never be an A without a B, a 1 without a 2, an a without a b, etc. Usually there is more than one way to divide parts; however, when dividing use only one basis of division and make the basis of division as sharp as possible. **For example:**

- A. Microcomputers hardware
 - 1. Types
 - 2. Cost
 - 3. Maintenance
- B. Microcomputers software

Or:

- A. Computers
 - 1. Mainframe
 - 2. Micro
 - a. Floppy Disk
 - b. Hard Disk
- B. Computer Uses
 - 1. Institutional
 - 2. Personal

Form

The most important rule for outlining form is to be consistent! An outline can use **Topic** or **Sentence Structure**.

A **Topic Form** uses words or phrases for all entries; it uses no punctuation after entries. **Advantages** – presents a more detailed overview including possible topic sentences and is easier and faster for writing the final paper.

An outline can use Roman Numeral/Letters or Decimal form.

Roman Numeral

- I.
 - A.
 - B.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - a.
 - b.
- II.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.

Decimal

- 1.0
 - 1.1
 - 1.2
 - 1.2.1
 - 1.2.2
 - 1.2.2.1
 - 1.2.2.2
- 2.0
 - 2.1
 - 2.2
 - 2.3

SAMPLE OUTLINE

Purpose: To show how programs written for microcomputers relate to the process of writing.

Thesis: Microcomputer programs can have a positive effect on students' writing if both the potentials and limitations are understood.

Audience: Current college and university students.

Microcomputer Programs and the Process of Writing

I. Major Steps in the Writing Process

- A. Organizing
- B. Writing the first draft
- C. Evaluating
- D. Revising

II. Writing Programs and Their Relationship to the Writing Process

A. Types of and Their Relationship to the Writing Process

1. Thought
 - a. Use in organization
 - b. Use in revising
2. Word Processors
 - a. Use in writing the first draft
 - b. Use in revising
3. Analytical programs: grammar, style, spell
 - a. Use in evaluating
 - b. Use in revising

B. Positive and Negative Aspects of Computer Writing Programs

1. Positive features
 - a. Less time spent on repetitive or mechanical writing tasks
 - b. Greater flexibility and versatility in writing process
 - c. Increased revision strategies
 - d. Specific learning possibilities
2. Negative features
 - a. The increased time spent on learning software programs and computers
 - b. The availability of hardware and software
 - c. The unrealistic expectations of users
 - 1) A cure-all for writing problems
 - 2) A way to avoid learning correct grammar/syntax/spelling
 - 3) A method to reduce time spent on writing proficiency
 - 4) A simple process to learn and execute

C. Future Possibilities of Computer Programs for Writing

1. Rapid change
2. Improved programs
3. Increased use and availability
4. More realistic assessment of value – critical work

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