

How to write an Outline for a Paper

What is an outline?

An outline can be defined as an organizational plan to help you draft a paper. Writing an outline before beginning a paper is the most effective way to organize your thoughts. An outline breaks down the parts of your thesis in a clear, hierarchical manner to help you see the overall format of your paper.

Remember: The three parts of a paper included in your outline are: an INTRODUCTION, a BODY, and a CONCLUSION.

INTRODUCTION- State your thesis and the purpose of your research paper clearly. What is the chief reason you are writing the paper? State also how you plan to approach your topic. Is this a factual report, a book review, a comparison, or an analysis of a problem? Explain briefly the major points you plan to cover in your paper and why readers should be interested in your topic.

BODY- This is where you present your arguments to support your thesis statement. Remember the Rule of 3, i.e., find 3 supporting arguments for each position you take. Begin with a strong argument, then use a stronger one, and end with strongest argument for your final point.

CONCLUSION- Restate or reword your thesis. Summarize your arguments. Explain why you have come to this particular conclusion.

What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement declares what you believe and what you intend to prove. A good thesis statement makes the difference between a thoughtful research project and a simple retelling of facts.

A good tentative thesis will help you focus your search for information. But don't rush! You must do a lot of background reading before you know enough about a subject to identify key or essential questions. You may not know how you stand on an issue until you have examined the evidence. You will likely begin your research with a working, preliminary or tentative theses which you will continue to refine until you are certain of where the evidence leads.

The thesis statement is typically located at the end of your opening paragraph. (The opening paragraph serves to set the context for the thesis.)

Remember, your reader will be looking for your thesis. Make it clear, strong, and easy to find.

Sample idea for creating an outline for a paper



I will create an outline that focuses on the life of Senator Barack Obama.

How do you create an outline?

Keep in mind: If you're not sure whether you have a good thesis statement, see whether you can fit your ideas into one of these basic patterns.

{Something} {Does something} because {reason(s)}

Example:

Barack Obama made an early commitment to excel in school in order to achieve his goals in life.

For longer papers, thesis statements can be very complex.

While {a specific, named person} says {a direct quote or paraphrase from the source}, {a different, named person} says {something else}.

While the two authors disagree over {a minor point}, they both share a deep concern over {the topic of your paper}. {Person one's} refusal to accept {a particular point made by person two} suggests that {person one} is {your thesis—stating the real reason why person one won't agree with person two}.

Sample Outline Format

Title of Outline (Place title of the outline here)

(Example) The Life and career of Barack Obama)

The topic of your paper is important. Try to sum up the point of your paper in one sentence or phrase. Identifying the topic will focus the main point of your paper.

- I. Introduction-(Brief comment leading into the subject matter- Thesis statement on the subject)

Remember: A thesis statement tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the paper.

- II. Body- (The body covers what you will cover in your paper)

Example: Barack Obama's Early Life, Marriage, Works, Run for President.

- A. Early life in Honolulu, and Indonesia

1. Barack Obama's family
 - a) Barack's father
 - b) Barack's mother
2. Barack Obama's marriage
 - a) Michelle Obama
 - b) Barack Obama's children

- B. Barack Obama's Career

1. Political Career
 - a) Civil Rights Lawyer
 - b) Community organizer
 - c) U.S. Senator

- C. Barack Obama's 2008 Presidential Campaign Issues

1. The Economy
 - a) The American Opportunity Tax Credit
 - b) Simplifying the Financial Aid Process

- III. Conclusion

- A. Analytical summary

1. Barack Obama's early life
2. Barack Obama's career
3. Barack Obama's 2008 Presidential Campaign Issues

- B. Thesis reworded

- C. Concluding statement

Blank Sample Outline Format

Title of Outline

- i. Main topic
 - a. Important subtopic
 - b. Important subtopic
 - 1. Detail
 - a. Sub-detail
 - b. Sub-detail
 - c. Sub-detail
 - 2. Detail
 - 3. Detail
 - a. Sub-detail
 - b. Sub-detail
- ii. Main Topic
 - a. Important subtopic
 - b. Important subtopic
 - 1. Detail
 - 2. Detail

References

Obama, Barack. *Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. New York: Times Books, 1995.

Strunk, W. (2000). *The Elements of Style*. New York: Longman.

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