Outlining

The Center

To outline or not to outline, that is the question...

Should you create an outline? Yes! Creating an outline will help you organize your ideas, build content, and ensure your ideas are well supported. Outlines also make you seem uber-smart 😊

**NOTE:** You should always follow your instructor’s preferences when creating an outline. Some instructors like formal outlines while others use informal ones. Some require formal Roman Numerals and at least 2-3 sub-points for each – but other instructors do not! **Before you create your awesome outline, talk to your instructor!**

Here are some common types of outlines and numbering systems:

**Alphanumeric**
The alphanumeric outline numbering system is the most common. Here are the four levels:

- Roman Numerals: I, II, III, IV, V
- Capital Letters: A, B, C, D, E
- Arabic Numerals: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
- Lowercase letters: a, b, c, d, e

These are formal outlines that follow specific formatting (such as use of hanging indents for the levels).

**Full Sentence Outlines**
The full sentence outline format uses the alphanumeric numbering system. However, full sentence outlines need a full sentence at every level of the outline. Such outlines can be useful when drafting. Many of your full sentences will become topic sentences or supporting sentences in your paper!

See how each new level of the outline is indented? The indents help you show the relationship between your ideas. The main idea of your paragraph is the Roman numeral I. This is the most important point, so it goes the furthest into the left margin. Level A is a sub-point, so it is indented. Level 1 is a sub-point of Level
A, and so on. See how these show the relationship between ideas in your paragraph?

I. Going to the writing center will improve your writing in many ways.
   A. Writing center superheroes Gabby and Jared work with you one-on-one.
      1. In a 45-minute session, they can work with you on both HOC and LOC concerns.
         a. Thesis statements are a typical HOC.

Decimal Outlines
Decimal outlines use a decimal numbering system. Here is an example:
1.0 Sign up for a tutoring session in the Writing Center
   1.1 Go to the South Campus Writing Center Website
   1.2 Click on the making an appointment link

Notice how using a decimal system also shows the relationship between ideas through numbering and using indentation like the alphanumeric outline.

Informal Outlines
Informal outlines do not use a formal numbering system. You might use an informal outline to get your ideas going or as a tentative structure for your paper. Here is an example:

Tentative thesis: Regularly visiting the TCC South Campus Writing Center will help you become the best writer on the planet because they have superhero tutors, current technology, and fantastic handouts.
   o Gabby Raymond and Jared Landin, superhero tutors
   o Superhero tutors & iPads
   o Hilarious & insightful handouts

The Four Elements
Effective outlines also consider four elements: parallelism, coordination, subordination, and division.
Parallelism: Headings and subheadings should be parallel in terms of parts of speech and phrasing. For example, if the first word in Heading I is a verb, then Heading II should start with a verb.
   I. Go to the writing center.
   II. Meet the writing center tutors.

Coordination: Information in all headings should be of the same significance. Subheadings are less significant than headings. For example:
I. Some experts argue that writing center directors should directly supervise instructional associates regularly.
II. Writing Center electronic surveillance is convenient and consistent and may help directors supervise.
Subordination: Headings should be general and broad, while subheadings should be more specific. For example:
   I. Directors can help instructional associates improve weekly.
      A. Weekly staff meetings help associates discuss recent issues that need attention.

Division: Each heading should be divided into at least two parts. Here Heading I is divided into two parts.
   II. Instructional associates’ rights to privacy are an important issue when considering supervision.
      A. Instructional associates have the right to work independently
      B. Instructional associates often work on-on-one with students.

Additional Outlining Tips
   o Put your thesis at the top (as a reminder to you and your reader)
   o Include at least two items at each level (if you have an A, you need a B!)
   o Limit the number of major sections (if you have too many, this may be a sign you should reorganize!)
   o Use sentences for the sake of clarity (phrases may seem too vague or be unclear)

Making an outline may seem unnecessary, but remember this will help you gather your ideas before you start writing! You can also get feedback on your topic and overall organization, which will help you save tons of time.

NOTE: You should always follow your instructor’s preferences. Some instructors like formal outlines while others use informal ones. Some require formal Roman Numerals and at least 2-3 sub-points for each – but other instructors do not! Before you create your awesome outline, talk to your instructor!

On the following page is a template for two main points of a formal outline so you can see some typical formatting.
I. Main Point 1

A. Supporting point
   1. Sub-point
      a. Sub-sub-point
      b. Sub-sub-point
   2. Sub-point
      a. Sub-sub-point
      b. Sub-sub-point

B. Supporting point
   1. Sub-point
      a. Sub-sub-point
      b. Sub-sub-point
   2. Sub-point
      a. Sub-sub-point
      b. Sub-sub-point

II. Main Point 2

A. Supporting point
   1. Sub-point
      a. Sub-sub-point
      b. Sub-sub-point
   2. Sub-point
      a. Sub-sub-point
      b. Sub-sub-point

B. Supporting point
   1. Sub-point
      a. Sub-sub-point
b. Sub-sub-point

2. Sub-point
   a. Sub-sub-point
   b. Sub-sub-point