



# Outlining Ideas - A Means of Organizing Your Thoughts

This handout covers two outline styles that MIGHT help you complete your final draft. These suggestions are for those who find themselves not getting to the organizational point they desire or who need to move past the Five Paragraph essay format. Note that for outlines you do not need to write in complete sentences!

## Option I: The “A then B” Outline

### I. Introduction

- a. Follow the genre conventions of your discipline. Should you include the author’s name(s)? Should you include the titles of the sources you are citing? Make sure to provide background information about your topic according to what your professor has specified.<sup>1</sup>
- b. Craft a clear thesis statement on which to end your introduction.
  - i. Here you will rely on genre conventions. Is it an argumentative essay? If so, your thesis probably needs to take a stance or position on the argument or it needs to make its own argument.
  - ii. Is it a research paper? Then your thesis will share what the main focus of your paper is. Ask your professor for examples if you get stuck!

### II. Body Paragraph I ... On the One Hand - share an idea: Begin with Topic Sentence or idea which involves a specific connection to your thesis

- a. Thesis: Jones’s essay has some weak points when it comes to the message he presents. Topic Sentence: The logos of his essay isn’t very strong. It’s hard for me to follow his idea.
- b. Find evidence to support
  - i. Ex: Multiple illogical claims including the idea that the Earth is flat.
- c. Consider how you might analyze the evidence:
  - i. Ex: Jones doesn’t have credible evidence for his claim
- d. Conclude and transition to next paragraph
  - i. Ex: Because of unreliable evidence Jones isn’t appealing to the audience’s logical interest in the subject.
  - ii. Think about using key transition word and phrases: furthermore, however, conversely, moreover, on the other hand...

### III. Body Paragraph II ... On the Other Hand - share a different idea

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<sup>1</sup> If she, he, or they have not specified, please make sure to attend their, her, or his office hours.

- a. Begin with another critique or piece of praise
    - i. Ex: the author appealed to the audience's emotions.
  - b. Find evidence to support
    - i. Ex: As evidenced by his use of the story about the ship that disappeared, the author wanted the audience to feel sympathy.
  - c. Conclude and transition to next paragraph
    - i. Ex: Because of his personal, heart-wrenching stories, readers are able to feel the emotion of this piece.
- IV. Repeat for body paragraphs all the way until the conclusion
- V. Conclusion
- a. Make sure to explain why what you shared is important. Maybe it's interesting, maybe it's new information, maybe it's surprising information. Whatever the case, tell your readers why you went through all the bother of writing this essay. For now, you can just jot down bullet points.
    - i. Ex: disproving the earth is flat; focusing on rhetorical appeals (logos, ethos, pathos); sharing that some people still think earth is flat even though it's not.

## Option II: The Compare/Contrast Outline

- I. Introduction
- a. Follow the genre conventions of your discipline. Should you include the author's name(s)? Should you include the titles of the sources you are citing? Make sure to provide background information about your topic according to what your professor has specified.<sup>2</sup>
  - b. Craft a clear thesis statement on which to end your introduction.
    - i. Again, here, you will rely on genre conventions. Is it an argumentative essay? If so, your thesis probably needs to take a stance or position on the argument or it needs to make its own argument. Is it a research paper? Then your thesis will share what the main focus of your paper is. Ask your professor for examples if you get stuck!
- II. Body Paragraph I
- a. Begin with something that the text(s) or argument you're responding to does well as compared to something it/ they do(es) poorly
    - i. Ex: Johnson does a poor job focusing on logos, she does a stellar job articulating pathos
  - b. Find evidence to support your claims

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- i. Ex: story about euthanizing animals means she empathizes with pet owners who have to make that difficult decision; but her reasoning against euthanizing is not clear
  - c. Conclude and transition to the next paragraph
    - i. Ex: The author over all makes the audience understand her emotional appeal but she must work more on her logic for readers to agree with her.
  - d. Keep in mind that for the evidence you're going to use, you should always be as specific as possible when describing the evidence AND citing it. If your professor or discipline does not allow for direct quotations, paraphrase clearly what evidence you're sharing. If it does allow for these types of quotations, use them. In either situation, make sure to analyze your evidence to have a strong, well-organized essay.
- III. Repeat for body paragraphs until the conclusion. Rotate between things done well and things done poorly so as to provide the comparison (well) and contrast (poorly/different).
- IV. Conclusion
  - a. Make sure to explain why what you shared is important. Maybe it's interesting, maybe it's new information, maybe it's surprising information. Whatever the case, tell your readers why you went through all the bother of writing this essay. For now, you can just jot down bullet points.
    - i. Ex: disproving the earth is flat; focusing on rhetorical appeals (logos, ethos, pathos); sharing that some people still think earth is flat even though it's not.

## Resources:

For more resources on crafting an essay step-by-step, we recommend the following:

- Purdue's Online Writing Lab (commonly referred to as the OWL@Purdue) offers excellent outlining tips. You can google the OWL and then type into the search bar on their website "outline" or use [this link](#). (If you're on a mac computer and the link won't work, hold down the !command button and click on the words underlined, in blue.)
- Our [M.E.A.L. Plan handout](#), which can take you to the next step between having an outline and having an essay. This handout will allow you to look at how to craft organized, well-flowing body paragraphs which will strengthen your essay. Just sign up for another appointment and we'll share this handout with you!