

# Outlines



## What can outlines do for your writing?

Outlines are planning tools for helping you organize your thoughts when writing a paper. Outlines can help you visualize the organization of your paper in a different way. Sometimes outlines are required to be created by teachers as an assignment, but an outline can be helpful even when it is not required. Since an outline is just a tool for helping you organize your paper, an outline can be as detailed or simple as you need it to be.

## What are some common features of outlines?

Most outlines have an introduction, body, and conclusion that mirror the structure of the paper. For example:

Project title: "How to Write and Outline"

### Intro

Needed information – Why would someone want to write an outline?

Thesis – Outlines are useful for organizing papers!

### Body

1) How do I make an outline?

1.1 - Talk about how easy outlines are to make

1.2 - What is an introduction in an outline

2) Other uses of an outline?

2.1 - Reverse Outlining

2.2—Outlines for class assignments

### Conclusion

Outlines can be very useful tools for working on academic papers.

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## **What are some useful approaches for completing an outline for a class assignment?**

Many teachers request students turn in an outline of a paper they will actually write later in the course. This is important because it not only allows the teacher to check up on you as a student and make sure you are on track to finish your paper, but it also allows the teacher to give you feedback about your paper before it is in rough draft form. You may also be expected to include a works cited or reference page to show what sources you are considering using in your later paper.

Keeping this purpose in mind, an outline for a class assignment should be as detailed as possible. If your teacher's assignment does not make clear what details they expect in your outline, make sure to approach them and ask. Different teachers may want different systems of numbering sections, may or may not want you to include a bibliography, or may even have very specific expectations like wanting you to include the first sentence (the "topic sentence") of each of your major paragraphs in the outline.

## **What are some ways to use your outline as you write?**

While most people think of an outline as just a planning tool, something you do before your rough draft, if you make one at all, the main purpose of an outline is to give you a way to visualize the flow and organization of your paper. In this way an outline can be of great use when you are revising your paper, as it is much easier to picture moving the sections of an outline around into different patterns instead of large paragraphs made up of many sentences. Remember that an outline is not a binding contract of any kind; you can revise your outline at any time or divert from the outline when writing your paper as it is common for writers to change their thesis, organization, or approach as they write.

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### **How can you use an outline after you've finished a draft?**

One important way that an outline can be of help late in the writing process is the "reverse-outline." A reverse outline is when you take an already written out paper and attempt to create an outline of it. Consider the following: What is the important information in the introduction? What is the thesis statement? What are the many points of the argument? (and how many points are there?) What was the overall message of the conclusion?

You can then take this outline and use it for important revision work. Imagine for a moment that you receive a paper back with an unsatisfactory grade, with the recommendation you revise it. Creating a reverse-outline can help you see if your argument became disorganized throughout the body of your argument, or if your conclusion did not match up with what your thesis promised. Looking at the main points of your argument in the simpler form of an outline might help you realize important information you left out of your introduction.

### **Final thoughts.**

As I hopefully have shown you, outlines don't have to be stressful and can often be very useful when you're working on a paper, whether or not it is for class. It is something you can do at any time in the writing process, not just the beginning. Most importantly, the outline is just a tool for organizing your thoughts, and unless it is for an assignment, it doesn't have fixed requirements beyond having enough details for you to be able to picture how your paper will be structured. Focus on how the outline might be useful to you, and you may find what you think should go in that outline becoming obvious. Good Luck!