

Working With Working Outlines

Unlike other methods of discovering ideas, outlining provides a formula. However, if you create a rigid outline when you begin, you can hinder writing and can cause frustrations during the writing process.

In contrast, **working outlines** – outlines that are tentative and can change as you write – can be extremely helpful, and they can make the writing process easier.

Uses

- Helps to provide a general plan for where you want the paper to go and what you want it to say while still remaining flexible.
- Allows you to get broad, sweeping ideas on the page before you forget them without having to go in-depth right away.
- Gives you smaller goals that can be reached as you write.

Sample Outline Format

Focus of paper (Topic, Subject) *

- (a) Introduction
 - i. context/issues
 - ii. why should the reader read this?
 - iii. tentative thesis
- (b) Broad Idea/Main Point **
 - i. supporting idea/fact
 - ii. supporting idea/fact
 - A. supporting quote/statistic/fact/examples, etc.
 - B. precedent or analogies
- (c) Broad Idea/Main Point
 - i. supporting idea/fact
 - A. precedent or analogies
- (d) Broad Idea/Main Point
 - i. supporting idea/fact
 - A. precedent or analogies
 - ii. supporting idea/fact
 - A. supporting quote/statistic/fact/examples, etc.
- (e) Conclusions

*can be, but does not need to be, your thesis

**broad ideas are not necessarily only one paragraph; they may be two, three, or more

Guidelines

- Allow yourself to make changes to your outline. What many people forget is that this is still a *working* outline, and it doesn't have to be perfect the first time around.
- Try not to be too specific. Balancing between too specific and too general can be difficult, but remember that each point on the outline is not a sentence – it is an idea.
- Give yourself time to think about each idea and how everything fits together. Rearranging the order is easier when outlining than after a paper is written.
- Be flexible. Not only can a working outline be changed, but it can be added to or subtracted from. If one point isn't working, put it off until later or take it out entirely; if you think of something new as you're writing, add it in.
- When working with a computer, let yourself cut and paste and move things around as you work. And don't forget to save!