Outlining Techniques & Templates

Metro State Writing Center, Fall 2023

Outlining is one of the most important skills a writer can have. As Professor Umberto Eco writes, having a plan allows you research and draft out of order yet still move a project forward coherently.

## **Skills to practice by conducting an academic research project:**

* Identifying a topic precisely
* Collecting relevant documents
* Ordering these documents
* Reading documents analytically
* Reassessing the topic in relation to these documents
* Organizing this work into an organic form
* Communicating findings from all this work
* Providing documentation so others can reexamine the topic through the sources presented in your work

## **Steps for creating a useful outline:**

1. Identify a topic and a research question or problem
2. Develop a working hypothesis/thesis
3. Create logical sections based on the topic, question, and thesis
4. No section or subsection should be less than a paragraph

“Be very committed to the outline. Be equally prepared to revise it.”

-in How to Write a Thesis by Umberto Eco, pp. 109-115

# **Basic Outline Template**

Working Title - a pre-view of the main consideration

Research Question - lay out the main investigation

Working Thesis - a tentative answer to the research question

1. **Introduction** - use this section to:
   1. Engage your reader
   2. Explain the purpose/importance of the paper
   3. State your main point (Thesis Statement)
2. **Background/History** (may be multiple sections) - use these sections to:
   1. Explain who, what, and when
3. **Claims/Main Points** (may be multiple sections) - use these sections to:
   1. Discuss how or why
   2. Support claims made in the Thesis Statement
   3. Discuss how each claim relates to the others
4. **Conclusion** - use this section to:
   1. Summarize key points
   2. Discuss the wider significance and implications of the topic
   3. Offer proposals or questions for future study
5. **References, Works Cited, or Bibliography**
   1. An alphabetized list of all sources quoted or referred to in the paper
   2. The style for entries (APA, MLA, ASA, Chicago) must match the style used for in-text citations

# **Introduction & Conclusion Outline Templates**

## **Introduction Paragraph**

Write one or two sentences for each point:

* Opening Statement or Attention Getter
  + An interesting fact, a quote, example, or observation about why you are writing
* Explanation of the Topic
  + Who, what, when, and where
  + The purpose of the essay
  + A preview of the main points
* Thesis Statement
  + The main opinion or argument stated as concisely as possible

## **Conclusion Paragraph**

Write one or two sentences for each point:

* Summary of Main Points
  + Reference your strongest points and summarize the argument
* Discuss the Significance
  + Explain why the topic is important and its wider implications
* Proposals & Further Questions
  + Suggest an action for your reader
  + Point out any future research still needed
  + Explain how others might use your work

# **Research Question Outline Template**

1. **Central Question**
   1. Sub-questions
      1. Main sub-question
      2. Secondary sub-question
   2. Development of the central question
      1. First implication
      2. Second implication

# **Background & Discussion Sections Outline Template**

1. **Background**
   1. Current and historical state of the issue or topic
   2. Previous related research
2. **Discussion**
   1. Hypothesis - your support, data, or evidence
   2. Analysis of the support, data, or evidence
3. **Conclusion/Proposal**
   1. Demonstration of your hypothesis
   2. Conclusions and suggestions for future research

# **Storyboard-Style Visual Outline Template**

Flexibly order sections

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Topic | Main Point | Key Point | Sub-Point | Support | Detail |

# **Literary Analysis Outline Template**

A basic template to make observations and provide textual evidence to support claims about a piece of literature

1. **Introduction** - use this section to:
   1. Catch your reader’s attention
   2. Introduce the author and title of the work(s) you are analyzing
   3. Provide a short plot summary
   4. State your main point/argument (thesis statement)
2. **Claims/Main Points** - use multiple paragraphs to present your argument:
   1. Write a topic sentence on what the paragraph is about and how it relates to the thesis
   2. Provide context for your quote by explaining who, what, and why
   3. Quote from the text
   4. Analyze the quote - show how it supports your thesis
   5. Write a closing sentence and transition to the next paragraph
3. **Conclusion** - use this section to:
   1. Summarize the key points of your observations
   2. Extend your argument - point to its broader significance
   3. Explain why the text is important