

Crafting an Outline

by Kathleen Lietzau, Writer's Web

- 1. Identify your topic.** Do not simply copy and paste the words from the prompt; put the topic in your own words to show your individual understanding. Try to stick with a single sentence or phrase, as this will help make sure you stay on topic.
- 2. Figure out your main points.** What are the main ideas you want to convey or need to convince your audience? These points usually answer the questions "why or how is the main topic important and right?" Together with your topic, these points should help you arrive at a working [thesis](#).
- 3. Arrange your main points** in a logical order and list them in the outline. This order can of course be changed later as you evaluate your outline.
- 4. Create sub-points** beneath each major idea. By convention, each time you have a new number or letter, there need to be at least two points (i.e. if you have an A, you need a B; if you have a 1, you need a 2; etc.). Though perhaps frustrating at first, it is indeed useful because it forces you to think hard about each point; if you can't create two points, then reconsider including the first in your paper, as it may be extraneous information that may detract from your argument.
- 5. Evaluate your outline.** Look over what you have written. Does it make logical sense? Is each point suitably fleshed out? Is there anything unnecessary?

Note that the standard order of an outline is:

- I. Roman numerals (I, II, III, IV, V, etc.)
 - A. Capital letters (A, B, C, etc.)
 1. Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.)
 - a. Small letters (a, b, c, etc.)
 - i. Small Roman numerals (i, ii, iii, iv, v, etc.)

You shouldn't have to go further than this. Also note that Microsoft Word tends to use a different system of ordering, though this can be changed. If you have to hand in an outline to your professor, it wouldn't hurt to check and see if they care about the numbering system. Otherwise, this outline is for your use, so use whatever works best for you!

Example From Professor Williams for Essay #3

Purpose of outline:

1. Show how the essay will be organized.
2. Show what content will be in the essay.

This example is a general way to write your essay #3 outline but you may use whatever method you like as long as it shows the organization and content.

- I. Introduction
 - A. State points of intro here
 - B. State Thesis here
- II. Personal Goals
 - A. Home/Location
 1. Info about house here
 2. Info about location here
 3. Info about cost of living here
 - B. Family
 1. Info about partner here
 2. Info about kids here
 3. Info about pets here
 - C. Hobbies
 1. Info about hobbies here
- III. Professional Goals
 - A. Job
 1. Position
 2. Location
 3. Income
- IV. Conclusion
 - A. Conclusion Points here

Be sure that you include evidence with source list for each of your points as needed. This is an example, all points may not be applicable to you.