



Reading Comprehension

Basic Outlining

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Basic Outlining

An outline presents a picture of the main ideas and the subsidiary ideas of any subject. Some typical uses of outlining are: a class reading assignment, an essay, a term paper, a book review or a speech. For any of these, an outline will show a basic overview and important details.

Some professors will require an outline in sentence form, or require the main points to be in chronological order, or have other specific requirements. A student's first responsibility, of course, is to follow the requirements of the particular assignment. What follows illustrates only the basics of outlining. The library presents it as a quick reminder because students often ask about outlining, and the information is not easy to find quickly in various reference books.

BASIC OUTLINE FORM

Below is a synopsis of the outline form. The main ideas take roman numerals. Sub-points under each main idea take capital letters and are indented. Sub-points under the capital letters, if any, take italic numbers and are further indented.

I. MAIN IDEA

- A. Subsidiary idea or supporting idea to I
- B. Subsidiary idea or supporting idea to I
 - 1. Subsidiary idea to B
 - 2. Subsidiary idea to B
 - a) Subsidiary idea to 2
 - b) Subsidiary idea to 2

II. MAIN IDEA

- A. Subsidiary or supporting idea to II
- B. Subsidiary idea to II
- C. Subsidiary idea to II

III. MAIN IDEA

It is up to the writer to decide on how many main ideas and supporting ideas adequately describe the subject. However, if there is a I in the outline, there has to be a II; if there is an A, there has to be a B; if there is a 1, there has to be a 2, and so forth.

OUTLINING EXAMPLE

Suppose you are outlining a speech on AIDS, and these are some of the ideas you feel should be included: AZT, Transmittal, AIDS babies, Teenagers, Safe sex, Epidemic numbers, Research.

To put these ideas into outline form, decide first on the main encompassing ideas. These might be: I. Transmittal, II. Societal Consequences, III. Research.

Next, decide where the rest of the important ideas fit in. Are they part of AIDS transmittal or AIDS societal consequences or AIDS research solutions? The complete outline might look like this:

Major Aspects of AIDS

Thesis: Many people believe that the AIDS virus is a disease that only affects certain segments of the population; however, research shows the opposite to be true, and it is essential for everyone who is at risk to know how it is transmitted, how it affects those who have it, and how scientists plan to cure it.

I. Transmittal of AIDS

- A. Transfusions
- B. Body fluids
 - 1. Sexual
 - 2. Non-sexual

II. Societal Consequences of AIDS

- A. Epidemic disease pattern
 - 1. Teenagers
 - 2. Women
 - 3. Homosexuals
- B. AIDS babies
- C. Increased homophobia
- D. Overburdened health care

III. Research Solutions to AIDS

- A. AZT
- B. HIV virus
- C. Other viruses

It is only possible to make an outline if you have familiarity with the subject. Not only in the initial outline, but during the course of the research, the writer may find it necessary to add, subtract or change the position of various ideas. This is acceptable as long as the logical relationship among ideas is preserved.