

# Welcome to the Purdue OWL



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## Four Main Components for Effective Outlines

Ideally, you should follow the four suggestions presented here to create an effective outline. When creating a topic outline, follow these two rules for capitalization: For first-level heads, present the information using all upper-case letters; and for secondary and tertiary items, use upper and lower-case letters.

### **Parallelism—How do I accomplish this?**

Each heading and subheading should preserve parallel structure. If the first heading is a verb, the second heading should be a verb.

### **Coordination—How do I accomplish this?**

All the information contained in Heading 1 should have the same significance as the information contained in Heading 2. The same goes for the subheadings (which should be less significant than the headings).

### **Subordination—How do I accomplish this?**

The information in the headings should be more general, while the information in the subheadings should be more specific.

### **Division—How do I accomplish this?**

Each heading should be divided into 2 or more parts. Technically, there is no limit to the number of subdivisions for your headings; however, if you seem to have a lot, it may be useful to see if some of the parts can be combined.

# Why and How to Create a Useful Outline

Why create an outline? There are many reasons; but in general, it may be helpful to create an outline when you want to show the hierarchical relationship or logical ordering of information. For research papers, an outline may help you keep track of large amounts of information. For creative writing, an outline may help organize the various plot threads and help keep track of character traits. Many people find that organizing an oral report or presentation in outline form helps them speak more effectively in front of a crowd. Below are the primary reasons for creating an outline.

- Aids in the process of writing
- Helps you organize your ideas
- Presents your material in a logical form
- Shows the relationships among ideas in your writing
- Constructs an ordered overview of your writing
- Defines boundaries and groups

How do I create an outline?

- Determine the purpose of your paper.
- Determine the audience you are writing for.
- Develop the thesis of your paper.

Then:

- **Brainstorm:** List all the ideas that you want to include in your paper.
- **Organize:** Group related ideas together.
- **Order:** Arrange material in subsections from general to specific or from abstract to concrete.
- **Label:** Create main and sub headings.

Remember: creating an outline before writing your paper will make organizing your thoughts a lot easier. Whether you follow the suggested guidelines is up to you, but making any kind of outline (even just some jotting down some main ideas) will be beneficial to your writing process.