

Essay Outlining: Overview

Taking the time to think through your project is an important step in the writing process and often overlooked. Strong assignments take time to form. Set aside time for prewriting.

Prewriting can include freewriting, brainstorming, talking to someone about the project, or anything that gets you to think about your writing and how all the pieces fit together. Try some of the following techniques to see how your paper fits together.

Freewriting

The process is to just write. Write anything about your topic (broad or small)! It doesn't matter whether or not you'll keep it in the end; you need to start working out the nuances of your topic and argument. To start, take a single word related to your topic and write it at the top of the page. Below it, write down some of the things you might like to say about the topic, or any directions you might want to take the argument in. Freewriting works best when it's timed. 10 to 15 minutes is usually all you need.

Reverse Outlining

After a free-writing session, look at what you are trying to say and create an outline. Take key topics or points and place them in a logical order of development.

Question-Based Outlines

If outlines are challenging because they require you to know all the answers before you start, consider starting with questions. As you build your questions, consider the relationship between them. Can you break down broad questions into a series of smaller ones? Often questions that start with "why" or "how" address sub questions like "what" "who" or "when." By working through questions and using them to organize the material you need, you can create a series of short-answer questions, which you can answer in any order that you want.

Clustering

If you're still not sure how to organize the information that you have gathered, consider creating a table. Use the table to work through your sources and information, creating clumps of ideas.

Idea 1: Look at each source and try to answer the following questions:

- What is the author's motivation?
- How does the author approach the subject matter? What kinds of words are used?
- What is the overall structure of the author's work? How do the separate parts fit together?

Idea 2: Develop a chart in which you list all your sources on one side, and on the other side possible criteria or ideas you think that your paper would address.

A Guide to Introductions and Conclusions

Introductions and conclusions offer directions and answer the following questions:

- What is the writing about?
- Why is the topic and discussion important?
- How it will be organized?

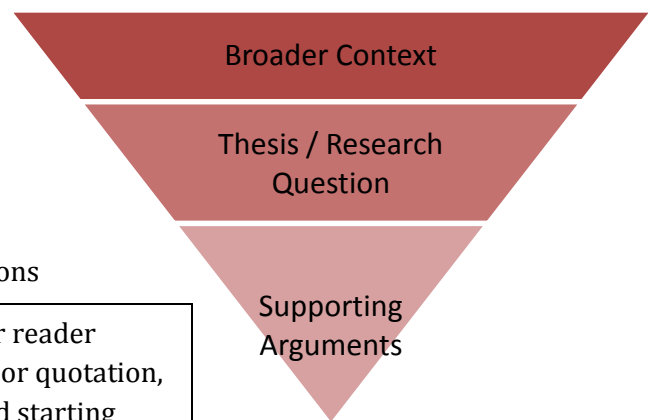
Use a consistent tense throughout your topic, most commonly the present tense. For example, don't start your paper with "will" (future) and end it in "have" (past).

Introduction

If you can give directions, you should be able to write a strong introduction. Your introduction should follow the LOST approach.

- L**ead with a bit of background and context
- O**vertly present key argument or purpose
- S**tate your key points or landmarks
- T**ell the reader what to expect in the following sections

Start with a gentle lead-in to your topic, so that your reader understands the topic. Don't start with an anecdote or quotation, unless you're extremely skilled at using them. Avoid starting with an unrelated or indirect topic in the hope that you'll be able to connect them through a series of clever sentences.



Conclusion

The conclusion takes your ideas and links them together. It explains the connection between the various things you've tried to prove and unifies your paper. Consider following the FOUND approach.

- F**ormulate your final insight
- O**utline how your paper builds to this insight
- U**nderline your contribution to our understanding of the topic
- N**ote implications of this contribution
- D**emonstrate the significance of your paper

Remind the reader of your contribution to the understanding of the subject. Don't only summarize your paper.

