Creating an Outline

An outline helps you arrange the order of ideas in a paper. Many students eliminate outlining in the writing process as an unnecessary step. However, writing an essay without an outline can create disjointed results. An outline provides a roadmap so that the essay can move smoothly from point A to point B to point C. Without an outline, the essay could easily become disorganized, e.g., A, B, A, C, B. This can confuse readers because the points of the essay are not arranged in correct sequence. Use the following suggestions to create an effective outline.

Creating Correct Formatting

The following information will help you format an outline correctly:

- Include at least *two* elements under each of the sections in the outline. If you have only one element, however, you can add additional information to create at least two points.

- Create parallel wording at the beginning of each section of the outline. If the first word begins with a noun, the first words in all other elements in that section must also begin with nouns. If the first word is a verb, the other elements must begin with verbs, etc.

- Include a period, and space or tab after each letter or number. Be consistent on using spaces or tabs throughout. (See the sample outline below.)

- Use double spacing in the outline for ease in reading *or* use single spacing throughout and double space between each of the major elements (I, II, II).

- Capitalize the first word after each number or letter in the outline. Also capitalize proper nouns, but do not capitalize the other words.

Using the Thesis Generator to Produce an Outline

You can construct an outline by using the Thesis Generator located in the Center for Writing Excellence. The *Generator* automatically creates an outline based on the information you provided to write the thesis sentence (*the Thesis Generator works best with persuasive writi*ng). After the *Generator* creates your thesis, use the following steps to create an outline:

1. Click on the button marked *Generate an Outline* in the lower right corner, and a draft outline will appear.

2. Retype the outline from the *Generator* into a Word document or use the print option on the bottom right corner to print the outline (the outline will not copy and paste easily into a Word document) before clicking the *next* button because the *Generator* does not save the outline.

3. Refine the outline by filling in other appropriate details to make it more precise. Remember that the more specific you make the outline, the easier it will be to write the paper.

Writing the Outline without the Thesis Generator

Use your brainstorming notes and the following steps to create an outline for your essay without using the *Thesis Generator*. Please read steps 1 through 4 before beginning your outline.

1. Type each of the major elements of the thesis sentence into a document using Roman numerals (I, II, III, etc.). Appropriate information can then be placed in the outline as listed below.

2. Insert capital letters under each major element and write the main ideas of the essay: I. A., then I. B., etc.

3. Add numbers under each letter to insert additional details: A. 1., A. 2., etc.

4. Include any supplementary material in lower case letters under each number: a., b., etc. See the sample outline under *II. F. Social Change 1. Paulo Freire* and *2. John Dewey* to see an example of formatting.

5. Write the paper based on your outline.

6. Review the outline after writing the paper to be sure that the paper is organized correctly. This step is part of the rewriting process.

Sample Outline

Use the following as a model to create your outline. If directions from your instructor differ from the explanations or example here, follow the guidelines of your instructor.

Philosophy of Adult Education

I.   Introduction

II. Primary purpose for education

    A. Acquisition of knowledge

    B. Skills development

        1. Job training

        2. Technological advancement

    C. Intrinsic motivation

    D. Development of social relationships

    E. Career advancement

    F. Social change

        1. Paulo Freire

            a. Liberating force of education

            b. Community change and support

        2.   John Dewey

            a. Students as "agents of change"

            b. Integrated learning

III. Adult learning style

    A. Self motivation

        1. Internal rewards

        2. Self-direction in learning

    B. Previous experiences

    C. Learning activities

        1. Meaningful

        2. Collaboration

IV. Conclusion

This sample outline represents the most common outline format. Additional outline format information can be found in *The Gregg Reference Manual* (this is an optional resource for students). Faculty standards for outlines submitted for a grade may vary. The faculty member's own standards will prevail in the event that the standards differ from this sample. *February 2011*