

Outlining

Outlining is considered a useful activity in academic writing as a means to help structure and organize the content of your paper and to visualize the logical progression of your argument/position.

An outline helps you to shape your paper in relation to your purpose in writing and to have a better understanding of the relationship among the various sections. Your outline is continuously revised during the research process as you formulate your topic and point of view, enlisting common organizing principles.

An outline serves as an organizational plan that accentuates the development of your paper; likewise, it provides an opportunity to review the progression of your argument and to evaluate whether the presentation of your research is logical, coherent, and effective.

Outline Format

Whereas a working or informal outline can take many forms, a formal outline usually follows standard guidelines regarding format and content, including elements of division and subdivision, indentation, capitalization and punctuation, and parallel grammatical form. The most common forms of outlining are the topic outline (using short phrases) or the sentence outline (using complete sentences).

Elements of Division and Subdivision

Begin your outline with your thesis statement: the single sentence that formulates the topic of your paper and your point of view.

The primary divisions of your paper that list your major points are indicated by roman numerals (I, II, III). These points are subdivided by using in descending order: capital letters (A, B, C), arabic numerals (1, 2, 3), lower-case letters (a, b, c), and further subdivision, if necessary, using arabic numerals and lower-case letters in parentheses.

Note: It is important to remember that logic requires that there be a “II” to complement a “I,” a “B” to complement an “A,” and so forth.

Outline Template

- I. Introduction
 - A. Grabber (Hook)
 - B.
 - C.
 - D. **Thesis Statement:**
- II. Point One
 - Topic Sentence:**
 - A. Supporting Detail
 - i. Comment about detail/example
 - ii. Comment about detail
 - B. Supporting Detail
 - i. Comment about detail/example
 - ii. Comment about detail
- III. Point Two
 - Topic Sentence:**
 - A. Supporting Detail
 - i. Comment about detail/example
 - ii. Comment about detail
 - B. Supporting Detail
 - i. Comment about detail/ example
 - ii. Comment about detail
- IV. Point Three
 - Topic Sentence:**
 - A. Supporting Detail
 - i. Comment about detail/example
 - ii. Comment about detail
 - B. Supporting Detail
 - i. Comment about detail/example
 - ii. Comment about detail
- V. Conclusion
 - A. Rephrase thesis statement
 - B. Summarize main points
 - C. Closing thoughts

Outline Example

- I. Introduction
 - A. Discussion of colorism in the 21st century.
 - B. Explanation of the word colorism and effects.
 - C. Colorism in the media regarding African-Americans community.
 - D. **Thesis Statement:** Colorism in the African-American community constitutes a form of race-based discrimination and is prevalent when analyzing slavery, economic privileges, and entertainment.
- II. Point One – Slavery

Topic Sentence: Examining colorism during slavery showcases the race-based discrimination within the African-American community.

 - A. Colorism’s effect on work duties.
 - i. Example of work duties.
 - B. White society’s perception of slaves.
 - i. Effects due to perception.
 - C. Discussion of how it started and reinforced colorism.
- III. Point Two – Economic Privileges

Topic Sentence: Economic privileges within the African-American community often correlate with colorism.

 - A. Explanation of “passing.”
 - i. Example of “passing.”
 - B. Discussion of job opportunities.
 - i. Example of disparities in job opportunities due to colorism.
- IV. Point Three – Entertainment

Topic Sentence: The most evident form of colorism in the African-American community is found in entertainment.

 - A. Discussion of colorism in film and television.
 - i. Example of colorism in a film.
 - ii. Example of colorism in television.
 - B. Discussion of colorism behind the scenes.
 - i. Example of colorism amongst directors.
 - ii. Example of colorism amongst producers.
 - iii. Example of colorism amongst writers.
- V. Conclusion
 - A. Rephrase thesis statement.
 - B. Summarize points about colorism and the harmful effects on the African-American community.
 - C. Closing thoughts