The Writing Center Presents:

Developing an Outline

Developed by Keith Evans
Purpose

- Generally, Outlines are for your own benefit: they help you organize your thoughts, your thesis statement, set out your arguments and sets up how your essay will flow.
- There are no specific guidelines for creating a general outline for yourself. However, some professors will ask for one along with a first draft.
- In this case, there are certain MLA guidelines to drafting an outline you should follow.
Elements of an Outline

- **Parallellism**: All your headings and subheadings should reflect one another. If the first heading is a verb, then the second should be a verb. The verbs should be in the same tense, preferably present tense.
- **Coordiantion**: Your points should link to one another to help your outline, and thus your essay, flow. The information in your first heading should have the same significance as the information in your next heading.
- **Subordination**: Your top heading should be general, but your subheadings should be specific. Each subheading should grow in specificity.
- **Division**: Each heading should be broken down into at least two subheadings.
Order

- Always start with a proper MLA heading.
- Directly after your title should be your thesis statement, it will not be indented.
Order Continued

- The first heading under your thesis statement should be the first main point of your essay that proves your thesis.
- Main headings will always be in roman numerals.
- Each subheading should have some significance linking it to each previous heading.
- Subordinate points should follow some cause and effect or chronological order.
Using the Library and Other Information Sources

I. Introduction to the library
   A. Programs of orientation and instruction
      1. Pamphlets, handbooks, other materials
      2. Orientation tours, lectures, courses.
   B. Books about the library (cite examples)

II. The central catalog or central information system
   A. The online central catalog
      1. Definition and description
      2. Searching the online catalog
         a. Searching by author, title, subject, keywords
         b. Limiting the search
         c. Using Boolean logic
            (1) Definition of Boolean logic
            (2) Examples of Boolean logic
      3. Information accessed from the online catalog
   B. Information needed for research and writing
   C. The card catalog and other catalogs
   D. The central information system

III. Reference works
   A. Types of reference works
      1. Indexes
      2. Bibliographies
      3. Collections of abstracts
      4. Guides to research
      5. Dictionaries
      6. Encyclopedias
      7. Biographical sources
      8. Yearbooks
      9. Atlases
   B. Publication forms of reference works
   C. Searching a reference database

IV. Location of library materials
   A. Classification systems
      1. Dewey decimal system
      2. Library of Congress system
   B. Main collection (open shelves, closed stacks)

       and so forth...

Conclusion -- knowledge of the library and successful research papers.
Conclusion

• At the end of your point-by-point outline, add a conclusion paragraph or abstract.
• This paragraph will summarize your paper and will illustrate how it will flow together.
• Briefly explain the significance of your main headings and sources in relation to your thesis.
Helpful Hints

- Subdivisions after the main heading will be bulleted with capital letters.
- Only divide subdivisions if needed. If you have an A, you must include a B. If you have a 1, you must include a 2.
- If you divide topics even further use lower case letters.
- Use complete, coherent sentences. Avoid fragments and single word word phrases.
Lucy Robbins
Mrs. Jenkins
American Literature
30 March 2000

The River as a Symbol for Good and Evil

Thesis: The Mississippi River in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn served as a symbol for good and evil in life.

I.

A.

1.

a.

(1)

(a)
Works Cited

• All information and graphics obtained from:

  *MLA Handbook 7th Ed.*

  The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL):  
  [http://owl.english.purdue.edu](http://owl.english.purdue.edu)

  The Modern Language Association:  
  [http://www.mla.org](http://www.mla.org)
The Writing Center Contact Info

Prairie View A&M Writing Center
Hilliard Hall, Room 118

http://www.pvamu.edu/pages/4399.asp

(936)261-3724
WritingCenter@pvamu.edu