

Outlines

Creating an outline can help you to plan a paper you're writing. In an outline, you arrange your main points in a logical order, add your supporting points and perhaps some evidence, and indicate the relationships among the points.

An outline isn't set in stone; you can change it as your thinking develops, but it is a helpful way to see the "skeleton" of your paper in advance. An outline is for you, the writer, as you think through your argument—not for your readers, who will see only the finished product.

Mind maps, lists, and flow charts can also be helpful ways to develop the "big picture" of your paper. Continue reading to see examples of formal and informal outlines.

Example: Informal outlines

Topic: the 2012 Quebec student protests

Narrowed topic: an examination of the scope, strength, and persistence of the 2012 Quebec student protests

Causes

1. strong historical and cultural support of accessible post-secondary education in Quebec
2. 2010 government plan to initiate tuition increases
3. participation of other groups in protests such as opposition parties and workers' unions
4. creation of Bill 78 (incited further conflict)

Effects

1. tuition freeze in September 2012
2. change of government after next election
3. former student leaders now involved in politics
4. but lack of substantive discussion about equity in education in Quebec

Formal Outlines

Like the informal outline, a formal outline should be a single-page display of the line of thinking your essay will develop. However, a formal outline is usually more detailed. It begins with the thesis statement and then presents major and minor sections of the essay in a logical order, clearly showing the relationships between the thesis statement, main points, subordinate points, and examples. For an expository essay, you may simply use key words or phrases to delineate your sections; for a persuasive essay, it's useful to write topic sentences for each supporting point to show how your argument will progress.

Example: Expository essay outline

Thesis statement: As social determinants of health, both unemployment and education have significant effects on the lives of the children in The Glass Castle; however, unemployment has devastating effects while education provides a way to a better life.

Similarities – both determinants have a major effect on children

1. The effects of the father's chronic unemployment:
 1. Frequent moves, lack of a stable home, uncertainty
 1. isolation, lack of social network
 2. lack of access to social services
 3. difficulty setting goals that support a positive sense of identity or a shift to a better life
 2. Poverty
 1. poor sanitation, housing, and nutrition, therefore poor health
2. The effects of education:
 1. Exposure to knowledge and different living conditions
 1. intellectual development
 2. awareness that life could be different / better
 2. Access to social support
 1. teachers
 2. friends

Differences – outcomes of these effects vastly different

1. Father's unemployment leads to worsening life conditions and negative effects on children
 1. effects on children's mental health
 - 1.
 - 2.
 2. effects on children's physical health
2. Education provides benefits that lead to changed life circumstances and improved health
 1. effect on children's mental health
 - 1.
 - 2.
 2. changed life circumstances
 - 1.
 - 2.
 3. improved mental and physical health
 - 1.

Example: Persuasive essay outline

This sample includes topic sentences related to the thesis, placed at the beginning of each section. Section C demonstrates how to include sub-points and evidence.

Thesis statement: The Canadian Charter protects many rights and freedoms of Canadians. However, the exercise of some of these rights and freedoms is undermined by a limited accessibility to both the political process and higher education.

Section A: The Charter extends democratic and equality rights to its citizens.

- 1.
- 2.

Section B: However, democratic rights are undermined by a limited accessibility to the political process.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Section C: As well, despite equality rights, many Canadians are disadvantaged by a limited accessibility to higher education.

1. The cost of post-secondary education is now prohibitive to many Canadians.
 1. average household income across provinces
 2. average tuition costs for several major programs at colleges and universities
2. The number of grants and scholarships for students has decreased.
 1. grants
 2. scholarships
3. In some areas, secondary school students are not encouraged to pursue higher education or are inadequately informed about their options, both of which limit their ability to access it.
 1. families not encouraging
 2. lack of career planning services in some schools

Template: Formal outline

You can use this template in whatever way you need: add supporting points or topic areas, examples, etc.

Thesis Statement:

1. First supporting point or key topic area:
 1. Sub-point or subtopic:
 1. evidence/example
 2. evidence/example
 2. Sub-point or subtopic:
 1. evidence/example
 2. evidence/example
2. Second supporting point or key topic area:
 1. Sub-point or subtopic:
 1. minor point or detailed information
 1. evidence/example
 2. minor point or detailed information

1. evidence/example
2. Sub-point or subtopic:
3. Sub-point or subtopic: