

HOW TO WRITE AN OUTLINE

A WRITING CENTRE HANDOUT

1. Have you placed your thesis at the top of the outline? Does every main division and every subdivision relate to and advance your thesis?
2. Does your outline emphasize important ideas and details by giving them adequate space? Check for “bulges,” too much detail, and for “slim” or underdeveloped ideas.
3. Are your supporting details, examples, etc. subordinated to the general statements in the outline?
4. Are ideas of the same level of generality ranked equally in your outline?
5. Is there a good mix of main headings and subordinate points? Do you have a clear pattern of idea - support/evidence?
6. Do your main divisions suggest the direction of your thesis?
7. Are your ideas arranged in the most effective order?
8. Check for gaps in the logical progression of your outline.
9. Is your outline concise? It must be brief enough to give you a picture of the whole essay.

Adapted from *Thinking it Through: A Practical Guide to Academic Essay Writing*

For a formal outline, follow the pattern below. Place ideas of equal weight on the same level. Remember that if you have a I. you must have a II., if you have an A. , you must have a B. etc.

Thesis Statement

- I. First main idea
 - A. First subordinate idea
 - 1. Reason, example, or illustration
 - 2. Reason, example, or illustration
 - a. Detail supporting reason 2
 - b. Detail supporting reason 2
 - c. Detail supporting reason 2
 - B. Second subordinate idea
- II Second main idea