



Outlines and Organization

Essay Structure:

Without organization, an essay is unreadable. Essays must be structured in order for your reader to understand your ideas and follow the progress of your argument. Creating an outline will help organize your thoughts before writing and serve as your guide during the writing process.

Three Parts of Your Essay:

Before creating your outline, you must be familiar with traditional essay format. The structure of your essay is divided into three major sections: introduction, body, and conclusion. Each section has a primary function:

Introduction/Opening

- ❖ Paragraph or paragraphs that will catch your reader's interest and/or give background information vital to understanding the topic of your essay.
- ❖ You are not limited to one introductory paragraph. Instead of including your thesis in the first paragraph, you could suggest it and then state it in a later intro paragraph. This section should be shorter than the body.

Body/Middle

- ❖ Include as many of these paragraphs as suits your paper—there is no limit. Each of these explains and supports a different element of your thesis.
- ❖ Include a topic sentence in each paragraph. Topic sentences state the main idea of the paragraph, contain evidence that supports your essay's thesis, and is usually put at the beginning of the paragraph (you can actually put this sentence anywhere in your paragraph). Everything in your paragraphs only contains info that supports the topic sentence. This will help you stay on track.
- ❖ In a longer essay, you could divide the body into subsections such as background, problems, and solutions.

Conclusion/Ending

- ❖ Make sure your reader will remember your thesis and any other important ideas from your essay
- ❖ It isn't necessary to restate your points in a short paper, but you may wish to if it's a longer essay
- ❖ Don't bring up new ideas and information here—it will distract the reader from your main points
- ❖ Share your final thoughts on the subject and bring your discussion to a close



Sample Outline

The following is a sample of an outline for an essay with six paragraphs. It illustrates the relationships between the thesis, topic sentences, and supporting evidence. All of the topic sentences are complete, which allows them to be transferred directly into the essay, and a variety of possible supporting evidence is included.

Title: The Unique Nature of a Documentary Film

I. Introduction

- A. Introductory statement
- B. Thesis statement: A documentary film is different than other films.

II. Body

- A. First Supporting Idea (Topic Sentence): Unlike other films, the documentary must convey the impression of authenticity.
 - 1. A *representation* of the world we already occupy
 - 2. Viewers anticipate a more accurate reality than when watching other films
- B. Second Supporting Idea (Topic Sentence): People are treated as *social actors*.
 - 1. For other films, people are treated as actors: valued for the quality of performance delivered
 - 2. Social actors continue to conduct their lives as they would have done without presence of the camera
 - 3. Cultural players rather than theatrical performers
- C. Third Supporting Idea (Topic Sentence): Documentary films are not edited for continuity.
 - 1. Other films rely on continuity editing to establish an imaginary world
 - 2. In documentaries things share relationships in time and space not because of the editing but because of their actual, historical linkages
- D. Fourth Supporting Idea (Topic Sentence): Documentaries rely heavily on the spoken word.
 - 1. Our identification with a fictional world depends on literal views
 - 2. Arguments (in documentaries) call for a logic that words better convey than images

III. Conclusion

- A. Restate thesis: Documentaries represent *the* world in which we live rather than *a* world, and thus affect the viewer differently and have different characteristics than other films.
- B. Closing statement