

Title of Module: Outlining

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Outline of Module

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- Understanding the relative importance of ideas
- Phrasing and Structure

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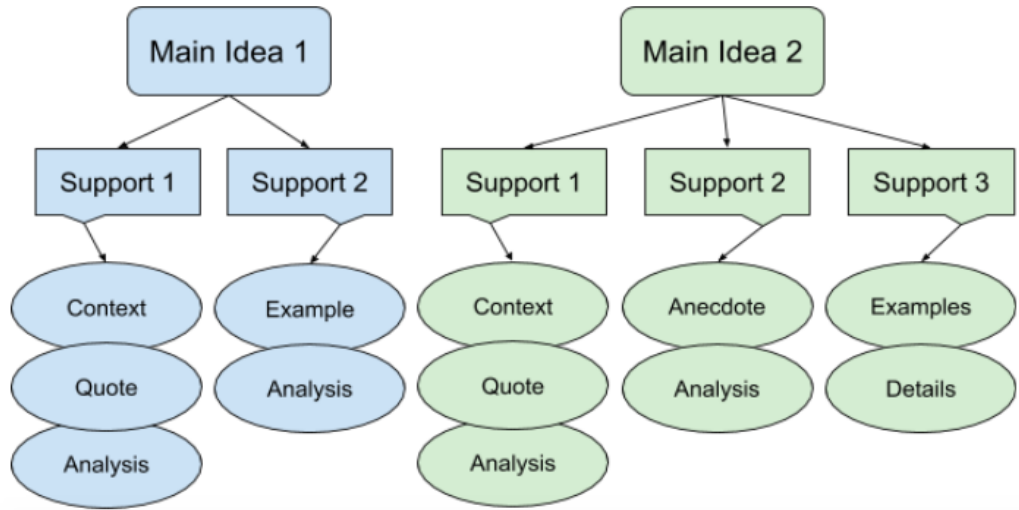
- Creating an outline for reading comprehension
- Outlining throughout the writing process

Video 1: The Purpose of Outlining: Creating a Visual Representation of a Text

One of the benefits of creating an outline is that it gives you a visual representation of the ideas contained within a text. At a glance, you can see from an outline which ideas are most central to the text and which are supporting points, details, or examples. Whether you choose to outline in a linear format or use a graphic organizer or mind map, you are ultimately creating an image that allows you to see the hierarchy of ideas in a text.

A hierarchy is a system of organization that allows you to rank and group ideas based on how important or central they are to the overall message or claim. The highest rank contains the fewest ideas: these are the main ideas or main sub-claims of a text. The middle rank groups together supporting points that relate to each main idea, and the lowest rank is used for smaller details or examples that add to each supporting idea.

The support may come in different forms depending on the nature of the evidence, as illustrated in the chart.



Creating an outline can help you better understand complex reading material, and it can also help you organize your own writing throughout the writing process, as we will see in the next (few) videos.

Video 2: Outlining for Reading Comprehension

Understanding the relative importance of ideas

Outlining can help you come to a better understanding of the reading material by creating a map of the relative importance of ideas. If what you read is well-organized, contains a clear and direct claim, topic sentences that introduce each sub-claim, and flows logically from beginning to end, it is often easy to see how each idea relates to the whole piece. However, not all writing follows such a linear structure. Many writers creatively incorporate stories, anecdotes, examples, statistics, and facts to get the reader's attention before getting to the main point. Some writers like to gradually lead their readers from one point to the next without directly stating what each distinct point is, and still other writers invite their readers to draw their own conclusions from a text without directly stating a main claim.

When you encounter such a text, creating an outline can help you understand what the writer wants to convey. To understand the relative importance of ideas in a text, ask yourself:

- How does each individual idea relate to the text as a whole?
- Which ideas are main points and how does each main point support the central claim?
- Which details, evidence, analysis, or examples provide support for each main point?

It can be challenging to tell whether an idea is central to a text or more tangential, but if you can differentiate between details and the ideas they support, it will be easier to see how they all fit together.

Phrasing and Structure

Creating an outline additionally allows you to practice your paraphrasing, summarizing, and quotation skills. Like other common types of academic writing, the majority of an outline should

be written in your own words, and you should be careful not to plagiarize any of the author's original phrasing.

One effective way to make sure that you are appropriately paraphrasing in an outline is to take notes in your own words - similar to translating the author's ideas into your own voice as a writer. When taking notes on the reading, ask yourself: If I had to explain this information to a friend, how would I phrase it? If you have notes to work with that are already in your own words, you will be less likely to accidentally copy the exact phrasing of the original text later on.

In terms of grammar, outlines commonly use abbreviated phrases as opposed to full sentences. Here is an example of how to start with the original phrasing from the text, turn it into your own paraphrase, and finally structure it like an outline. [This example comes from Stephen Pax Leonard's "Death by Monoculture," which can be found in the book, *Globalization: A Reader for Writers* or online at <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/discussion/death-by-monoculture>.]

Original Text: "Languages die for many reasons, but the current trend is driven by the juggernaut of the homogenizing forces of globalization and consumerism which seems unstoppable and whose language tends to be the new universal tongue, English" (Leonard 146).

The first step is to rewrite this idea in your own words. Terms like "juggernaut" or "homogenizing forces" may not part be of your regular vocabulary, so you should try to find other ways to express the meaning they carry.

Paraphrase: Leonard argues that globalization and consumerism are two important reasons why so many people feel the need to learn English, which leads to less of a need for other languages.

To turn this formal paraphrase into the format of an outline, you first need to find the main idea that is expressed and then list the supporting reasons.

Outline:

- I. Many languages are dying (main idea)
 - A. Globalization and consumerism have a strong influence
 - B. Many people learn English
 - C. Communication is easier in a universal language

The same A, B, C points may be conveyed in a condensed form, through phrases instead of sentences. For processing ease, these phrases have to be parallel structures: in this case, they are noun phrases.

- A. Strong influence of globalization and consumerism
- B. Dominance of English
- C. Easier communication in a universal language

As you can see from the example, the format of an outline is different from the format of a paragraph. The short sentences or phrases in an outline convey the same information as the

original text in a new, more visual way. Keep in mind that some of the supporting reasons may come from other parts of the text.

[Possible Online Activity Description]: Using a text you have recently read in class, follow the steps below:

1. Identify one main idea or claim - this could be a sentence that comes directly from the text or an idea that is implied.
2. Rephrase that idea in your own words - focus on how you would personally explain the idea and avoid using the author's original terms/phrases.
3. Reorganize the information into the phrases of an outline - this step is where you start to have a visual representation of how the ideas in the text relate to one another.
4. Look for examples, details or other support in the text that relate to this main idea - list a few ways this idea is supported by following steps 2 and 3 for each supporting idea.

Video 3: How to Create an Outline

Creating an outline for reading comprehension

Here are some steps you can follow when making an outline of your reading material:

1. **Gather ideas** → When outlining your reading material, gathering ideas involves reading the text, taking notes on the content, and thinking about what the author's thesis is.
2. **Organize ideas into categories** → Once you have read the text and taken notes or annotations, you should organize those ideas by looking for common themes or similar examples. Put related ideas together in groups.
3. **Define and distinguish each main idea** → For each group of information, focus on identifying what the author wants to convey to you as a reader. Label each group with a main idea. If you find that you have two groups that focus on a similar idea, consider combining them.
4. **Organize the main ideas in the most logical order** → To continue your outline, you can either organize the main ideas in the same order the author does, or you can rearrange them in whichever order seems most logical. Think about which ideas provide background information or context for other ideas and place those earlier in your outline. Refer back to the author's thesis often to make sure that the main ideas you identified support that claim.
5. **Organize the supporting ideas within each category** → Once you have your main categories or groups of ideas in order, you can add in the appropriate details and examples from the text that support each main idea. This is where you would include evidence, anecdotes, research, examples, details, or other support from your notes.

6. **Review the whole outline** → A completed outline of a text can be used to see the big picture of what an author wants to convey. Refer back to the text itself to make sure that your map of the text matches the written content.

By following these six steps to create an outline, you can develop a better understanding of your own reading comprehension and a better sense of the underlying structure of a text.

Outlining Throughout the Writing Process

You can also follow the previous steps to create an outline of your own paper at any point in the writing process as a way of checking to make sure that you are sticking to the stated claim of your paper, keeping your paragraphs focused and unified, and logically organizing your ideas. If you have trouble coming up with enough ideas to complete your outline, there is a good chance that you will have a similar problem when drafting your paper. This is one of the reasons why using an outline is an effective way to plan your paper - you can figure out if an idea is sound before putting all of your time and effort into writing a draft.

Similarly, after you have completed a draft of your paper, it is a good idea to check to make sure that your ideas are logical, focused, and clearly organized. To check this yourself, you can create what is called a “reverse outline.” To make a reverse outline, write out your thesis as the main idea. Then, list the topic sentence of each paragraph as the main points. Start by reading only these sentences and asking yourself how each paragraph supports your thesis. Then, look at the order of your paragraphs and check to see how each paragraph relates to the next one. Occasionally, you will find that your paragraphs make more sense in a different order. Outlining allows you to play with the structure of your paper until you find the most logically consistent way to present your ideas. Reverse outlining allows you to take a step back from the individual details and ideas in your paper so that you can more clearly see the bigger picture.

Whether you are working with your own paper or a text you read in class, outlining can help you come to a deeper understanding of the organization, structure, and logical consistency of a text.

List of References (in MLA style):

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