

Basic Outlining

An outline presents a picture of the main ideas and the subsidiary ideas of any subject. Some typical uses of outlining are: a class reading assignment, an essay, a term paper, a book review or a speech.

For any of these, an outline will show a basic overview and important details.

Some professors will require an outline in sentence form, or require the main points to be in chronological order, or have other specific requirements. A student's first responsibility, of course, is to follow the requirements of the particular assignment.



What follows illustrates only the basics of outlining.

BASIC OUTLINE FORM

The main ideas take roman numerals (I, II, III, IV, etc.). Sub-points under each main idea take capital letters and are indented (A, B, C, D, etc.). Sub-points under the capital letters, if any, take Arabic numerals and are further indented (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.). If, and only if needed, further sub-points use lower-case letters and are further indented (a, b, c, d, etc.).

I. MAIN IDEA

- A. Subsidiary idea or supporting idea to I
- B. Subsidiary idea or supporting idea to I
 - 1. Subsidiary idea to B
 - 2. Subsidiary idea to B
 - a) Subsidiary idea to 2
 - b) Subsidiary idea to 2

II. MAIN IDEA

- A. Subsidiary or supporting idea to II
- B. Subsidiary idea to II
- C. Subsidiary idea to II

III. MAIN IDEA

It is up to the writer to decide on how many main ideas and supporting ideas adequately describe the subject. However, if there is a I in the outline, there has to be a II; if there is an A, there has to be a B; if there is a 1, there has to be a 2, and so forth.