

ESSAY OUTLINING

Is outlining really worth the time when you could just start writing instead? Yes, it is! An essay outline creates a blueprint for your paper that allows you to organize your thoughts, establish connections between ideas, evaluate your arguments, and ensure that all your evidence supports your thesis.

Before You Begin

- Before you start your outline, review your research notes to write a *working* thesis statement.
 - A working thesis statement is a “thesis-in-progress.” You might adjust it later as you develop your outline/paper, but having this starting point will make organizing your thoughts in your outline easier.
- For tips on crafting a thesis statement, view our “Developing a Thesis Statement” tip sheet.

Step 1: Organize Your Notes

- Start your outline by organizing your research notes.
 - Look for patterns in your research, and think about which of your notes might be grouped together under a common theme or heading.
 - If any ideas or notes don’t seem to fit or connect to your thesis, this might be a sign that this information is not relevant to your paper and should be removed.
- Next, combine your note groups into larger categories as needed. These should be the foundational “supporting arguments” of your thesis, also known as the “sections” of your paper.
 - You should aim to have no more than three or four arguments for a 7-10 page paper.
 - Ex: The note groups “Jesus’ understanding of women” and “Jesus’ teaching on women” could both fall under the category “Jesus’ opinion of women.”

Step 2: (Re-)Phrase Your Main Points

- Consider writing a summarizing “topic sentence” or “argumentative phrase” that captures the main point of each supporting argument/section.
- The notes you grouped with this sentence/phrase become the points and subpoints of that section. This is how you will defend your thesis.
 - These subpoints will consist of evidence, examples, illustrations, and other support from your research.
 - Ex: A point for the supporting argument of “Jesus’ opinion of women” might be “Jesus established women’s value through his ministry.”

Step 3: Arrange Your Points and Evidence

- Organize your research according to the logical format that most accurately fits your paper’s argument. Some examples of logical structures include:
 - **Chronological** – Cover the information in order from beginning to end.
 - **Cause and Effect** – Each argument builds logically (as an “effect”) on the previous argument.
 - **Columns** – Each argument is distinct from one another, with no connection between each other, but each supporting the thesis independently (like individual columns support a roof).
 - **Compare and Contrast** – Some sections show similarities between topics; some sections show differences between topics.
 - **Climactic** – Build from the weakest to the strongest argument.
 - **Behavioural Sciences** – Typically follows this order: Literature Review, Method, Results, Discussion.
- Place your arguments, evidence, and examples into a visual outline that follows this logical order. There is a sample on the following page!

(Adapted from David Kornhaber. *Outlining*. The Writing Center at Harvard University. 2000. Web. 14 Feb. 2013.)

The Role of Women in the Early Church

I. Introduction

- A. Opening: Breaking social barriers
- B. Thesis: The ministries of Jesus and Paul uplift women and portray them as intelligent and dignified.

II. Women in Jesus' Teaching and Ministry

- A. Correction of sexist attitudes in marital relationships
 - i. Adultery (Matthew 5:28, 32)
 - ii. Divorce (Matthew 19:6, 8)
- B. Jesus' esteem of women
 - i. Used women as moral examples
 - a. Widow's mite (Mark 12:41-44)
 - b. Woman at Bethany (Mark 14:6-8)
 - ii. Acknowledged women for their understanding of Jesus' ministry
 - a. Revelation to the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-26)
 - b. Honour accorded to female disciples (Luke 8:1-3; Cohick p. 310)
 - iii. Noted the loyalty of the female disciples
 - a. Women at the crucifixion (Matthew 27:55-56; O'Collins and Kendall p. 640)
 - b. Mary Magdalene first to witness the resurrected Jesus (John 20:16-17)

III. Women in Paul's Teaching and Ministry

- A. Female collaborators in Paul's Ministry
 - i. Romans 16 catalogue
 - ii. Priscilla (Acts 18)
 - iii. Phoebe and Apphia (Smith p.152)
- B. Christian wives and pagan husbands
 - i. Witnesses to husbands (1 Cor. 7:16)
 - ii. Risk of abuse (MacDonald p.192)
 - iii. Intergenerational faith (2 Tim. 1:5)
- C. Paul's esteem of women
 - i. Equal authority over husband's body (1 Cor. 7:4, Stark p.120-121)
 - ii. Value of single women (1 Cor. 7:40)

NOTE: When placing quotations or examples in your outline, include the author and page number of the sources for quick reference and to ensure you don't forget them when writing your paper.

IV. Conclusion

Additional Notes

- The key to outlining is to clearly organize your information to show where one argument ends and another begins. In this way, it will be much easier to keep track of how you are defending your thesis as you write.
- As you write your paper, you may find that your argument shifts direction. This is totally fine! Just make sure that if you diverge from your outline, you also adjust your paper's arguments and thesis statement to match.
- This sample is not *the* definitive way of outlining. You can adjust the way you do your bullet points or lettering to match what makes sense for you. But if your professor asks you to submit an outline, make sure to do something more formal and to follow their standards.
 - An informal outline could be as simple as one that consists of point-form notes for an introduction, a body (with the main points highlighted and support listed for each), and a conclusion, with these same broad headings.

(This outline was adapted from Elyssa Tardiff and Alan Brizee. "Developing an Outline: Types of Outlines and Samples." *The Writing Process*. Purdue Online Writing Lab. 2013. Web. 19 Feb. 2013.)

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