

# Outlining and Classical Essay Structure

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to construct an outline for an academic research essay. Specifically, this lesson will focus on:

## 1. Classical Essay Structure

Like most other forms of writing, essays use sentences and paragraphs and should include a structure of ideas that flows logically from one point to the next.

Most essays end up with three primary components, though of course there's room for variation, even within the confines of traditional academic essays:

1. Introduction: Essays generally begin with an introduction that lays out the primary purpose, goal, or point of the essay. Most include a thesis statement toward the end of the introduction.
2. Body Paragraphs: Essays also include body paragraphs, which are paragraphs that contain the primary points or ideas of the essay, making up the body of the work.
3. Conclusion: After the body paragraphs usually comes a conclusion, which is a final paragraph or two that wraps up the main points of the essay, and may point to further questions, ideas, and areas of thinking that are beyond—but still linked to—the essay's scope.

In terms of qualifying as an essay, there are no rules regarding the number of paragraphs or supporting points included. Obviously, the length and depth of these components are likewise variable, depending on the writer's needs and the assignment's requirements.

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## 2. Organizing Your Writing

When you write, you need to organize your ideas in an order that makes sense, and an **outline** can help you do that.

Especially for a longer essay, an outline will help you determine the order of your paragraphs, ensuring that your purpose stands out clearly and all parts of the paper work together to consistently develop your main point.

Order refers to your choice of what to present first, second, third, etc. in your writing. The order you pick

closely relates to your purpose for writing that particular assignment.

#### IN CONTEXT

When telling a story, it is usually important to first describe the background for the action. When writing an argumentative research essay, you will want to group your support effectively to convince readers that your point of view on an issue is well-reasoned and worthy of belief.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Outline

A prewritten plan for an essay or other piece of writing which generally includes primary ideas and a structural organization.

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## 3. Outline Structure

There are two types of formal outlines:

- Topic outlines, which use words and phrases to represent ideas
- Sentence outlines, which use complete sentences to state ideas

You format both types of outlines the same way.



#### STEP BY STEP

1. Place your introduction and thesis statement at the beginning, under Roman numeral I.
2. Use Roman numerals (II, III, IV, V, etc.) to identify main points that develop the thesis statement.
3. Use capital letters (A, B, C, D, etc.) to divide your main points into parts.
4. Use Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.) if you need to subdivide any As, Bs, or Cs into smaller parts.
5. End with the final Roman numeral expressing your idea for your conclusion.

#### IN CONTEXT

Here is what the skeleton of a traditional formal outline looks like. The indentation helps clarify how the ideas are related.

##### I. Introduction

A. Thesis statement

##### II. Main point 1 → *becomes the topic sentence of body paragraph 1*

A. Supporting detail → *becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 1*

1. Sub-point

2. Sub-point

B. Supporting detail

1. Sub-point

- 2. Sub-point
- C. Supporting detail
  - 1. Sub-point
  - 2. Sub-point
- III. Main point 2 → *becomes the topic sentence of body paragraph 2*
  - A. Supporting detail → *becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 2*
    - 1. Sub-point
    - 2. Sub-point
  - B. Supporting detail
    - 1. Sub-point
    - 2. Sub-point
  - C. Supporting detail
    - 1. Sub-point
    - 2. Sub-point
- IV. Main point 3 → *becomes the topic sentence of body paragraph 3*
  - A. Supporting detail → *becomes a support sentence of body paragraph 3*
    - 1. Sub-point
    - 2. Sub-point
  - B. Supporting detail
    - 1. Sub-point
    - 2. Sub-point
  - C. Supporting detail
    - 1. Sub-point
    - 2. Sub-point
- V. Conclusion



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned what **classical essay structure** looks like in the context of academic research writing. You also learned that an outline is a helpful method of **organizing your writing**. Since it is meant to emulate an essay, a typical **outline structure** consists of the introduction and thesis at the beginning, followed by the main points and supporting details in the middle, then a conclusion at the end.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This content has been adapted from Lumen Learning's "Outlining" tutorial.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Outline**

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