

## Making an outline

- I. Outlines abbreviate and summarize information.
  - A. Unlike [abstracts](#), which are in the form of a paragraph, outlines are more structured.
    1. *Classical outlines*, such as the one you will write in this class, have a defined format.
    2. Informal outlines are abbreviated and hierarchic, like classical outlines, but they may be presented in other formats.
      - a. One common informal format is the *bulleted list*.
      - b. The dots or squares beginning each line are “bullets”.
      - c. Bullets imply that the sequence of items is not as important as it would be if numbers were used.
  - B. You can often find information organized in outline format even if there is no explicit outline.
- II. Outlines are hierarchic.
  - A. An outline begins by breaking an article, book, or chapter into major divisions or headings.
    1. These often correspond to the headings of the article, such as “Results” and “Discussion”.
    2. In a book, the chapters are a natural first division.
  - B. Each of these is further divided into groups, which may correspond to subheadings.
  - C. These can be divided further, even to the topic sentence of each paragraph.
- III. The classical outline has a set format. The first level is numbered by [Roman numerals](#). The ancient Romans wrote numbers with these cumbersome numerals; our modern numerals come from the Arabs. (**Important** - If this item doesn't have the Roman numeral “III”, your web browser may not be able to handle Roman numerals; see [here](#) for a corrected version.)
  - A. The second level is numbered with upper case letters (also called capitals, or *majuscules*). If you needed letters past “Z”, you would use “AA”, “AB”, and so on.
  - B. By convention, there must be at least two entries at each level. If there is only one, it should be combined with the higher level that includes it. In this part of the outline, I'll ignore that rule, so that I can show you the numbering at each level.
    1. The third level is numbered with Arabic numerals.
      - a. The fourth level is numbered with lower case letters (“small”, or *minuscule*).

- i. The fifth level is numbered with lower case Roman numerals (ironically, the ancient Romans didn't have lower case letters).
        - ii. After the fifth level, you're on your own.
  - C. Classical outlines are of two forms.
    - 1. Sentence outlines consist of complete sentences (ending with periods). This outline is a sentence outline.
    - 2. Topic outlines consist of words or phrases, not complete sentences.
- IV. Outlining is a good way to study new material.
- A. When you outline something, you have to figure out the way the information is structured.
  - B. Outlining focuses your attention on the main points, so that they aren't hidden by the details.
  - C. An outline is a document of lasting value.
    - 1. You can use it as a quick reference to the document that is outlined.
    - 2. It lets you know what you were thinking when you first read the document.
    - 3. If you write an outline instead of highlighting in a book, you can get more money for the book when you sell it later.
- V. Outlining is a good way to begin a writing project.
- A. The main headings determine the top level of the outline. For example, if you were writing a research paper, you might start with "Introduction", "Materials and Methods", "Results", "Discussion", and "Conclusions".
  - B. Within each heading, think of logical divisions of the information. These might become subheads in the finished manuscript. For example, "Materials and Methods" might contain "Experimental organisms", "Protocol", and "Statistical Analyses".
  - C. Continue to divide and compartmentalize the information. The lowest level of the outline might be the topic sentences of each paragraph.
  - D. Once you're done, fill in the words! The initial manuscript might sound a bit mechanical, but later revisions will fix that, and you'll be sure that everything is there, and in a logical order.
- VI. Many computer word processing programs have outlining modes that automatically handle numbering and indenting.

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