Outlining Basics

Why Should I Make an Outline?
An outline is a prewriting tool that helps structure your paper. Some instances where outlines can be helpful are:

- You have done initial research, but are unsure how to organize it into a paper
- You have working thesis, but need to expand upon it
- You have points you want to make, but need to make sure they have enough support

Outlines can solve these concerns, and many more, by providing a “sketch” of what you want your paper to look like. Like all prewriting, outlines are not set in stone; rather, they are a tool to ensure ideas are fully developed. If you choose to reverse outline your finished paper, you can also check that the outlines are similar, which helps create a well-developed paper.

How Do I Make an Outline?
Your outline should be divided into as many sections as you have paragraphs. A rough template of each section would look something like this:

I. Paragraph topic
   a. Supporting evidence
      i. Analysis

The paragraph topic is the argument your individual paragraph will make; in other words, what do you want your paragraph to be about? The supporting evidence, as the name suggests, is a collection of examples that support your argument; analysis provides the reason the evidence supports the argument. At a bare minimum, each topic should have a 1:1 ratio of evidence to support. More evidence and more analysis generally create a stronger paper; analysis should be a large part of most papers.

Example Outline
Thesis: Thor is the best Avenger.

I. Appearance
   a. Long, flowing hair
      i. Good hair = good superhero

This is a basic example of an outline section. By looking at this section, it is assumed the paragraph will be about how Thor’s outward appearance makes him the best Avenger, specifically how his hair makes him a better superhero.

II. Powers
   a. Lightning
      i. Strongest force
      ii. Nature-given power; nature approves of him
      iii. Only Avenger to have supernatural power
   b. Mjolnir
      i. Worthiness
      ii. “Man”-given power; Odin approves of him
   c. Physical strength
      i. Self-given power; worked for his heroics
         1. Tie in with Mjolnir worthiness (see “Note”)
This is a more detailed example of an outline section; note its variable ratios of evidence to analysis. What would a paragraph written from this section look like?

*Note:* In the section “Physical strength,” there is an attachment to the analysis (“1. Tie in with Mjolnir worthiness”). This is an additional tool that can used to help connect points. The outline is fine without any attachments, although they may be helpful if you are concerned with the flow of your paper.

**Contact**
Want help creating an outline? Come work with a tutor at the Writing Center! Drop by or use the information below to contact us and set up an appointment.

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