

Part 6: Constructing a Working Outline for your Essay

At this point, you have accomplished the following tasks:

- 1) chosen your general topic
- 2) researched your general topic
- 3) narrowed down your general topic to a specific aspect that you will use to construct a manageable thesis based on the scope and length of the essay
- 4) constructed your Thesis argument.

Now, you want to construct an Outline that will effectively support your Thesis argument.

Take the information that you have from researching your topic and break it into separate aspects of your topic that you can easily manage to prove your Thesis. Your Outline will be a point form map for the development of your argument.

The main function of your Outline is to create a map of the path of your argument. Keep in mind that your Thesis is the most important part of your essay. Any information that you present must be offered to help you to prove your Thesis.

Try to avoid digressions or needless information that is auxiliary to proving your Thesis.

Introduction

There are two ways that you can construct your introduction:

- 1) You can begin with a general topic or subject and move forward through the paragraph, moving from the general topic to your thesis statement, which is the point of view that your entire essay will be constructed to prove.
- 2) You can also begin with the thesis statement as your first sentence and then explain how you will present the information in your essay before concluding the introductory paragraph with a reiteration of the point of view that you will be supporting.

If you choose the first method, then your introduction consists of four steps. Any essay that you write, regardless of the length, will follow these four steps.

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The number of sentences that you use to fulfill each of the first 3 steps of your Introduction will depend on the nature of the material that you are presenting and the length of your essay.

Keep in mind that the Thesis, which is the final step of your introductory paragraph, must be contained in one sentence, regardless of the length of your essay.

Step 1

Introduce the general subject of your essay and the central Text(s) and Author(s) whose work will serve as the primary focus of your paper.

Step 2

Introduce the specific aspect of your general subject that your essay will focus on.

Step 3

Define the key terms that the reader needs to know to understand the material that you are presenting.

Step 4

Break the specific topic of your essay into body topics. Introduce the topics of each of your body paragraphs in the order that you will be presenting them in your essay.

Step 5

Present your Thesis statement.

Notice that these 5 steps move from the general to the specific. They begin with the general topic, before moving through the specific aspect of that topic and your body paragraph topics to the Thesis, which is the specific point that your entire essay is going to prove. Your Introduction must follow these steps to create a precise and logical argument for the reader to follow.

Your Introduction will serve as a guide for the reader. If the reader gets lost at any point during the course of your essay, they can always refer back to the introductory paragraph to remind themselves of where they are in the process of your paper.

Remember, your introduction can and should be rewritten more than any other part of the paper. No matter how accurate your outline, it will change while you are writing your essay. That is why, in order to be accurate, you will want to thoroughly re-rewrite it.

Body Parts

Each of your Body Parts will be set up the same way, but each body part will be a different step in the development of your argument.

The outline for your body should present your Topic Statement, and the information and quotes that you will present within that topic to explain that topic to support your Thesis.

Step 1

Each body part should begin with a single Topic Statement. The Topic Statement will correspond to the body topics that you outlined in Step 3 of your Introduction.

Step 2

Here you will present the quotes and information that are pertinent to this body topic to prove the validity of your Thesis statement.

Each time you present a quote or information, you should do so in the following steps:

- 3) Set up your quote or information. You must set the context for your quote or information before you present it in the paragraph. Your body paragraph cannot be a mere list of quotes and information. Each quote must be presented in a clear and logical manner to support your Thesis.
- 4) Provide the quote or the information accurately.
- 5) Indicate the significance that you see in the quotation or information in relation to the topic of the paragraph.

For a comprehensive set of ways to stylistically introduce quotes within a body paragraph, see page 4-5 in the **Heritage Handbook for English**.

Each of these Three steps must be followed each time you present quotes or information within your body paragraphs to support your body topic. Each of these three steps may be done in one or more sentences, but the order of the steps must be adhered to.

Step 3

At the end of your part, you must present a Minor Conclusion that will summarize the information within your part and relate it back to the Thesis of your Essay. This step may take several sentences to fulfill, depending on the length and depth of your Body Part. This serves to remind the reader where you are in the process of your argument, and it will conclude the part and allow you to move on to the next Body Part.

Conclusion

Your Conclusion should remind the reader of the subject or purpose of the essay, summarize the main steps of your body parts, and restate your Thesis.

It should follow these steps:

Step 1

Restate the general subject or the purpose of your essay. This tells the reader that you are finished with the presentation of information in the form of Body Parts to prove your Thesis. It also reminds the reader of the movement of your logical argument from the general to the specific. You may use more than one sentence at this step, depending on the length and depth of your argument.

Step 2

Restate the Minor Conclusions for all the body parts in the order that they appear within the essay. This reminds the reader of the different steps that you have taken to conclusively prove your Thesis statement, while summarizing the development and minor conclusions that you have presented through the course of the essay. You may need several sentences to accomplish this goal and give a comprehensive explanation of each of the stages of your essay.

Step 3

Restate your Thesis. This concludes the development of your logical argument and it shows the reader what you have proven through the course of the essay. Again, your Thesis statement will be presented in a single sentence.

Step 4

If you can, put your now proven thesis in the context of a wider understanding of the text.

The purpose of the Conclusion is to summarize the main points of your argument, in the order that you made them, to conclusively support your Thesis statement.

You should not introduce any new information in your Conclusion, but you can present a new perspective that you have arrived at now that you have proven your thesis. You want to be able to open the reader's eyes to a new way of seeing the text.