



DALLAS BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Outlining: Structuring a Paper

Outlining Helps a Writer

- Group and arrange ideas.
- Plan the development and organization of his or her paper.
- Check for gaps in information.
- At any time during the writing process, especially if s/he encounters difficulty continuing.

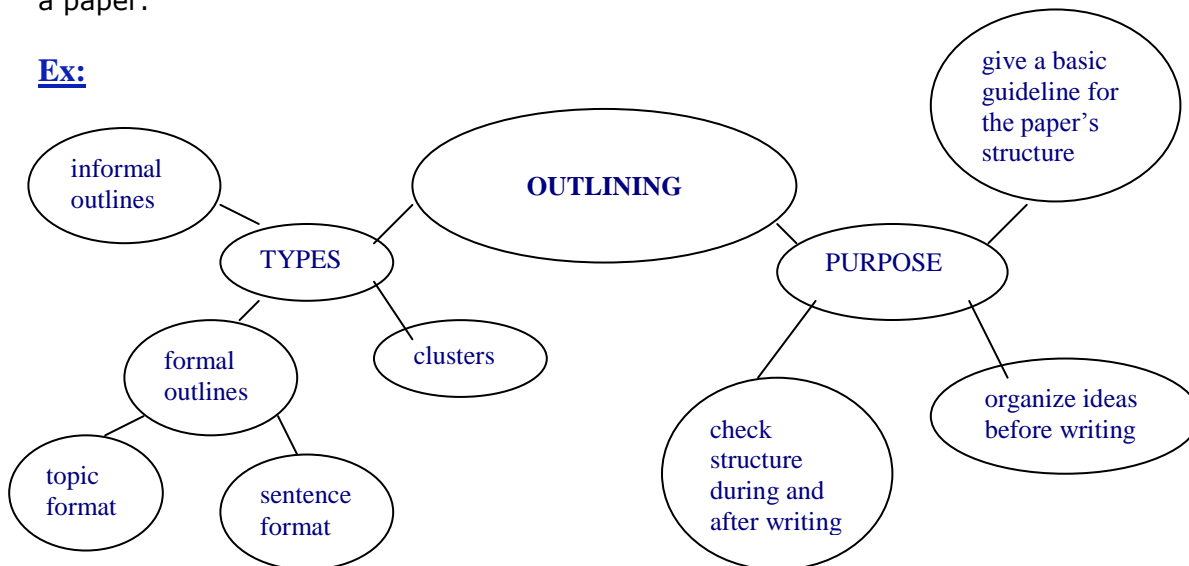
There are a few different ways to outline ideas, with each type of outline offering various amounts of flexibility: informal outlines, clusters, and formal outlines.

Informal Outlines are more flexible because they are less detailed and do not have a specific, required format. Informal outlines generally:

- Sort ideas relating to one overall topic into smaller groups, which can then be arranged in a possible order.
- List subordinate (supporting) ideas and details within these groups under their appropriate sections, usually in no particular order.
- Include a rough draft of the thesis statement at the beginning.

Clusters are especially helpful for testing possible topics to see if there is enough information for an entire paper. They differ from outlines because they demonstrate the subdivisions and relationships between pieces of information without delineating the possible order of presenting that information within a paper.

Ex:



Making a cluster is one way of putting information into different subdivisions that show relationships between ideas. A cluster is repeatedly divided into subtopics and should begin with the most general ideas at the top and progress to more specific each time there is a branch off.

To Make a Cluster

- Begin by grouping ideas in general categories according to themes or patterns found in the information one has collected or brainstormed.
- Then organize each category into subdivisions, placing it in the chart according to how specific or general each piece of information is in relation to the rest.

Formal outlines provide a more complete and defined plan of structure. They match the following format exactly.

Example Thesis Statement and Outline:

There are many different types of outlining, including informal outlines, clusters, and formal outlines, each of which can help a writer develop and check the structure of his or her paper at different stages in the writing process.

I. Informal Outlines

A. Definition and description

1. A grouped listing of brainstormed and/or researched information
2. Shorter than a formal outline
3. More loosely structured than a formal outline

B. Purposes/Uses

1. Groups ideas
2. Arranges ideas into a preliminary pattern for a rough essay structure

II. Clusters

A. Definition and description

1. A diagram of ideas grouped according to their relationships
2. Continually subdivides
 - a. Starts general at the top
 - b. Becomes more specific as it branches out towards the bottom

The outline continues in this manner.

If there is one piece of information at a specific level, then there must be a second piece of information to go along with it. For example, if there is a I, there must be a II; if there is an A, there must be a B, and so on.

Applications of Outlines in Evaluating the Strength of a Paper's Structure

A person can use an outline to ensure that the information in his or her paper matches the thesis statement. Remember, at any time in the writing process, it is okay to reorganize the structure of the paper and of the outline. In fact, reorganizing the outline when changes are made to the paper will help one make sure that the structure of the paper is not weakened by the change.

Gaps of Information

In clusters, gaps of information are determined by how balanced the branching is. If one area of the cluster branches off and becomes very specific while another part barely branches out at all, then there is a gap of information. This same type of situation applies to informal and formal outlines. If one area has more supporting details or becomes much more specific than the other sections, then there is a gap of information. In these cases, more research needs to be done, certain sections may need to be deleted or changed, or a new topic may need to be selected.