How to make an outline

STEP 4. MAKE A TENTATIVE OUTLINE

All points must relate to the same major topic that you first mentioned in your capital Roman numeral.

Example of an outline:

I. INTRODUCTION - (Brief comment leading into subject matter - Thesis statement on Shakespeare)
II. BODY - Shakespeare's Early Life, Marriage, Works, Later Years
   A. Early life in Stratford
      1. Shakespeare's family
         a. Shakespeare's father
         b. Shakespeare's mother
      2. Shakespeare's marriage
         a. Life of Anne Hathaway
         b. Reference in Shakespeare's Poems
   B. Shakespeare's works
      1. Plays
         a. Tragedies
            i. Hamlet
            ii. Romeo and Juliet
         b. Comedies
            i. The Tempest
            ii. Much Ado About Nothing
         c. Histories
            i. King John
            ii. Richard III
            iii. Henry VIII
      2. Sonnets
      3. Other poems
   C. Shakespeare's Later Years
      1. Last two plays
      2. Retired to Stratford
         a. Death
         b. Burial
            i. Epitaph on his tombstone

III. CONCLUSION
   A. Analytical summary
      1. Shakespeare's early life
      2. Shakespeare's works
      3. Shakespeare's later years
   B. Thesis reworded
   C. Concluding statement

The purpose of an outline is to help you think through your topic carefully and organize it logically before you start writing. A good outline is the most important step in writing a good paper. Check your outline to make sure that the points covered flow logically from one to the other. Include in your outline an INTRODUCTION, a BODY, and a CONCLUSION. Make the first outline tentative.

INTRODUCTION - State your thesis and the purpose of your research paper clearly. What is the chief reason you are writing the paper? State also how you plan to approach your topic. Is this a factual report, a book review, a comparison, or an analysis of a problem? Explain briefly the major points you plan to cover in your paper and why readers should be interested in your topic.

BODY - This is where you present your arguments to support your thesis statement. Remember the Rule of 3, i.e. find 3 supporting arguments for each position you take. Begin with a strong argument, then use a stronger one, and end with the strongest argument for your final point.

CONCLUSION - Restate or reword your thesis. Summarize your arguments. Explain why you have come to this particular conclusion.
What is an outline, anyways?
The first thing to remember is - do not stress! This is not rocket science, it is just an outline.

Before you get all hung up on making the perfect outline, remember this: an outline is just your reference notes for writing your essay or research paper. You use it to ensure that you keep your thoughts, ideas, and facts straight.

Your outline will be a source for you and you alone. Your instructor may want to see it, but this is typically just to make sure that you are on target with the topic and the purpose of the paper.

The first thing you want to do before doing anything is CHOOSE YOUR TOPIC! If your topic has already been chosen for you, decide what angle you will want to approach your topic with. Sometimes this can be one of the most difficult parts of writing, but it can also be the most fun because this is where your personality and creative energy begin!

How to begin making an outline
An excellent way to begin is just to free flow thoughts onto paper while brainstorming with your topic. Write down everything you think of, even if you will not use the information later. Once you have your thoughts down, it is time to start your rough outline. Select about three of your strongest points, and write them down.

Sample topic
For a sample topic, I will use “choosing a cellular phone plan.” Here is an example of brainstorming (free flowing thoughts):

Rates - family plans available? - Unlimited usage options - coverage area - what plans do most of my family and friends use? - Free calling within the network? - Texting options - vision package plans - roll over minutes - cost of going over minutes - C.P.S. available? - Direct connect options - how many minutes will I use? - What time do peak minutes end? - are there peak minutes shortage upgrades? - prepaid plans? - Why will I be using?

When doing this brainstorming session, it is best to hand write on a blank sheet of paper. Put your main topic of the outline in the center of the page, then start writing supporting thoughts surrounding the main topic. As you have ideas about individual supporting thoughts, jot them down near that supporting thought. It will help you organize it for your outline later.

Now, you are ready to put your thoughts into your outline. Do not get hung up on perfection. You can take care of perfecting it when you write your final paper.

Sample Outline for Essay or Research Paper

**ESSAY TITLE:** How To Choose a Perfect Cellular Phone Carrier

**I. INTRODUCTION**

A. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT: In today's in-touch society, it is almost essential to have a cell phone with you at all times.

B. THESIS: Before choosing a cell phone carrier, you should do careful research. (A thesis is your main argument, or “where you are coming from”.)

1. Determine when and how much you will use your phone.
2. Determine what features you will use.
3. Compare all available rates and plan options.

**II. BODY**

A. SUPPORTING POINT ONE: Determine when and how much you will use your phone

1. mainly evenings
2. mainly emergencies
3. a lot of peak usage

B. SUPPORTING POINT TWO: What features will be important to you?
   1. text messaging
   2. Internet access
   3. picture and video sharing

C. SUPPORTING POINT THREE: Compare rate plans
   1. What are the basic prices for the minutes you will use?
   2. What is the cost of the features you want?
   3. Will you benefit much if you choose one network over another based on within network calling benefits.

III. CONCLUSION
A. SUMMARY OF LISTED POINTS: Make your decision carefully based on your intended usage, preferred features, and budget.

B. CONCLUSION: You will be committing to a contract that is very expensive to get out of, so do not be pressured by a salesman or a family member. Be careful to take your time and not make an emotional decision.