

1.8.3. Final Outline

From Working Outline to Final Outline

After you have a satisfactory thesis statement, you can begin transforming your working outline into a final one. This step will help you organize your ideas and the accumulated research into a logical, fluent, and effective paper. Again, many instructors request that final outlines be submitted with papers or included in a research project portfolio (see 1.9.4).

Deleting Irrelevant Material

Start by carefully reviewing all your notes to see how strongly they will support the various points in the working outline. Next, read over your working outline *critically* and delete everything that is irrelevant to the thesis statement or that might weaken your argument.

Eliminating material is often painful since you might have an understandable desire to use everything you have collected and to impress your readers (especially teachers) with all the work you have done and with all you now know on the subject. But you should resist these temptations, for the inclusion of irrelevant or repetitive material will lessen the effectiveness of your paper. Keep your thesis statement and your audience in mind. Include only the ideas and information that will help you accomplish what you have set out to do and that will lead your readers to care about your investigation, your presentation, and your conclusions.

Shaping a Structure for the Paper

As you continue to read, reread, and think about the ideas and information you have decided to use, you will begin to see new connections between items, and patterns of organization will suggest themselves. Bring related material together under general headings, and arrange these sections so that one logically connects with another. Then order the subjects under each heading so that they, too, proceed logically. Finally, plan an effective introduction and a conclusion appropriate to the sequence you have worked out.

Organizing Principles

Common organizing principles include

- **chronology** (useful for historical discussions—e.g., how the Mexican War developed)
- **cause and effect** (e.g., the consequences a scientific discovery will have)
- **process** (e.g., how a politician got elected)
- **deductive logic**, which moves from the general to the specific (e.g., from the problem of violence in the United States to violence involving handguns)
- **inductive logic**, which moves from the specific to the general (e.g., from violence involving handguns to the problem of violence in the United States)

Methods of Development

As you choose an organizational plan, keep in mind the method or methods you will use in developing your paper. For example, which of the following do you plan to accomplish?

- to define, classify, or analyze something
- to use descriptive details or give examples
- to compare or contrast one thing with another
- to argue for a certain point of view

The procedures you intend to adopt will influence the way you arrange your material, and they should be evident in your outline.

Integrating Quotations and Sources

It is also a good idea to indicate in the outline, specifically and precisely, the quotations and sources you will use. All this planning will take a good deal of time and thought, and you may well make several preliminary outlines before arriving at the one you will follow. But the time and thought will be well spent. The more planning you do, the easier and more efficient the writing will be.

Types of Outlines

If the final outline is only for your use, its form will have little importance. If it is to be submitted, your instructor will probably discuss the various forms of outline and tell you which to use. Whatever the form, maintain it consistently. The two most common forms are

- **the topic outline** (which uses only short phrases throughout)
- **the sentence outline** (which uses complete sentences throughout)

Labeling Parts of an Outline

The descending parts of an outline are normally labeled in the following order:

- I.
 - A.
 1.
 - a.
 - (1)
 - (a)
 - (b)
 - (2)
 - b.
 - 2.
- B.

II.

Logic requires that there be a *II* to complement a *I*, a *B* to complement an *A*, and so forth.

Creating Computer Files for Major Topics

If you have stored your notes in your computer, a helpful intermediate activity between outlining and writing is to incorporate your notes into your outline. Using this strategy, you should create a separate file for each major topic of your outline and shift relevant material, in appropriate order, from note files into the various topic files. Then, as you write, you can call up the topic files one by one and blend material from them into the text of the paper. Be sure to save and to back up your outline files.

1.8.4. SUMMING UP

- **A working outline** is a useful intermediary document between research and writing. It helps you gain an overview of the paper and keep track of all important aspects of the subject.
- **A thesis statement** is a single sentence that formulates both your topic and your point of view. It is an answer to the central question or problem you have raised. When preparing the thesis statement,

keep in mind your purpose in writing and the audience you are writing for.

- **The final outline** helps you organize your ideas and research into a coherent paper. Organizing principles include chronology, cause and effect, and deductive and inductive logic. The most common forms of outlining are the topic outline and the sentence outline. If you create a separate computer file for each major topic, you can write the paper by calling up each file in turn, following the progression of the outline.