

# Creating an Outline

Writing a paper or preparing a speech without an outline is like building a house without drawing a floorplan or driving across the country without consulting a map. The outline of a paper or speech provides direction during the creative process and gives structure to the finished piece. An outline brings order to your thoughts and acts as a reference while you write your speech or paper. Without such an outline, you may end up at the wrong destination or wander aimlessly through a countryside of words without conveying any meaning, which is the purpose of communicating in the first place.

## How to Begin

The first step in creating an outline is to create the framework. A standard format uses Roman numerals and alphabetic letters to establish levels in the structure. Once the structure is in place, the details can be added and ideas developed.

Below is a standard outline for a five-paragraph essay or speech. Each Roman numeral represents a separate paragraph.

- I. Introduction (includes the thesis statement)
- II. Main idea/topic sentence supporting thesis statement
  - A. Supporting detail
  - B. Supporting detail
  - C. Supporting detail
- III. Main idea/topic sentence supporting thesis statement
  - A. Supporting detail
  - B. Supporting detail
  - C. Supporting detail
- IV. Main idea/topic sentence supporting thesis statement
  - A. Supporting detail
  - B. Supporting detail
  - C. Supporting detail
- V. Conclusion (Based on the purpose of the paper or speech, summarize main points, reiterate thesis statement, issue a call to action, offer a solution to a problem, or pose a question)

The frame can be expanded to include more paragraphs; however, all essays and speeches must have an introduction, followed by a series of paragraphs that support the thesis statement, and end with a conclusion that completes the paper.

Each supporting detail, whether an example, fact or figure, should do just that – support the main idea or topic sentence of the paragraph. In turn, each topic sentence should relate to and support the thesis statement. The result is a well-built, organized paper or speech that clearly communicates an idea and fulfills a purpose.

## Basic Five-Paragraph Outline Frame

I. Introduction (write the thesis statement) \_\_\_\_\_

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II. Main idea (write a topic sentence supporting the thesis statement) \_\_\_\_\_

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A. Supporting detail \_\_\_\_\_

B. Supporting detail \_\_\_\_\_

C. Supporting detail \_\_\_\_\_

III. Main idea (write a topic sentence supporting the thesis statement) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

A. Supporting detail \_\_\_\_\_

B. Supporting detail \_\_\_\_\_

C. Supporting detail \_\_\_\_\_

IV. Main idea (write a topic sentence supporting the thesis statement) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

A. Supporting detail \_\_\_\_\_

B. Supporting detail \_\_\_\_\_

C. Supporting detail \_\_\_\_\_

V. Conclusion (write a topic sentence based on the purpose of the paper or speech: summarize main points, reiterate thesis statement, issue a call to action, offer a solution to a problem, or pose a question) \_\_\_\_\_

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