

THE OUTLINE

Getting started is frequently the most difficult part of writing. A good way to begin the organization of a theme or speech is to jot down a list of all the ideas you have about the topic. Brainstorm to generate ideas regardless of their order of importance. Next, narrow the ideas down and choose an appropriate method of organization. Then, prepare an outline.

A formal outline is a kind of graphic scheme of the logic of your paper; it contains the major ideas of your paper and should develop your thesis. Two main types of outlines are used: 1) The **topic outline**, and 2) the **sentence outline**. The advantage of the topic outline, besides its brevity, is that its parallel structure reveals the logic you will follow in your paper. The advantage of a sentence outline is that it helps you make sure you become sufficiently specific about your subject, rather than simply generalizing. Regardless of what type of outline you choose, you will need to have enough major headings to develop your topic fully within the boundaries established by your thesis statement. The following rules must be observed:

1. The sentence outline should consist of complete sentences. Compound sentences should not be used. If you have two equal points to make, divide that part of your outline into two points.
2. The topic outline may contain words, phrases, and dependent clauses.
3. The outline should contain parallel structure.
4. The outline does not contain the introduction and conclusion of your paper. It covers only the body of the essay.
5. When writing about literature, the points of the outline should always be in the PRESENT TENSE. Huckleberry Finn is rebellious, not was rebellious.
6. The first letter of each point should be capitalized.
7. A period should be placed after each introductory number or letter, such as I. or A., and at the end of each sentence.
8. Space the outline correctly with each number or letter introducing a subpoint going directly beneath the first letter of the one above it. **ALIGNMENT OF SYMBOLS, NUMBERS, AND LETTERS IN AN OUTLINE IS IMPORTANT.**
9. Observe all the rules of grammar and good style in your outline. For example, avoid the passive voice and the use of expletives.
10. The outline usually does not contain transitional words.
11. The outline should contain at least two items on each level. If there is a I, there must be a II. If there is an A, there must be a B. If there is a 1, there must be a 2.
12. The main points (I, II, etc) must relate directly to the thesis statement. The sub-points must relate to the points on the level above them.

Please turn page for Example Outlines...

Thesis: The use of alcohol and drugs can affect a person economically, psychologically, and physically.

Topic Outline

- I. Economical effects (*Main point*)
 - A. Alcohol (*Sub point*)
 - 1. Cost of alcohol purchases (*Detail of A*)
 - 2. Cost of DUIs (*Detail of A*)
 - B. Drugs (*sub point*)
 - 1. Cost of drug purchases (*Detail of B*)
 - 2. Cost of drugs arrest (*Detail of B*)
- II. Psychological effects
 - A. Alcohol
 - 1. Mental impairment
 - 2. Mental addiction
 - B. Drugs
 - 1. Mental impairment
 - 2. Mental addiction
- III. Physical effects
 - A. Alcohol
 - 1. Liver disease
 - 2. Alcohol poisoning
 - B. Drugs
 - 1. Brain damage
 - 2. Drug overdose

Sentence Outline

- I. Alcohol use can affect one economically.
 - A. The cost of alcohol is high and getting higher.
 - 1. The cost of DUIs can be enormous.
 - 2. Alcohol costs are always rising due to rising production costs as well as state and local taxes.
 - B. The cost of drug use can be high.
 - 1. Even the arrest for minute possession of drugs can result in high bail and court costs.
 - 2. The cost of drugs fluctuates drastically according to the type of drug, its availability, and the amount.
- II. Alcohol and drug use can have severe psychological effects.
 - A. Alcohol abuse can damage a person psychologically.
 - 1. Alcohol is a depressant and can alter the personality of anyone.
 - 2. The abuse of alcohol can lead to the psychological addiction of alcohol.
 - B. The use of drugs can be detrimental to one psychologically.
 - 1. Drugs impair one's ability to function normally due to hallucinations or numbness of "getting high."
 - 2. Drugs can become a psychological addiction.
- III. There are many physical effects of alcohol and drug use.
 - A. The abuse of alcohol can cause physical problems.
 - 1. The most common disease among alcoholics is cirrhosis of the liver.
 - 2. The massive consumption of alcohol can lead to alcohol poisoning and death.
 - B. Drug use has many physical implications.
 - 1. The unpredictability of drugs can often lead to an overdose and death.