

# LBCC Writing Center: Outlines, Outlines, Outlines

Sometimes students sit down to write a paper and find themselves staring at a blank screen, wondering where to go from there. An outline provides structure for a writer's thoughts, and the main point of an outline is to organize them. It answers the following questions: Does the order of information make sense? Do supporting details match topic sentences—and more importantly—match the thesis?

They can also reveal weak points in an argument or in research, as well as show possible areas for expansion. One benefit of outlines is helping a writer continue when writer's block hits.

There are various ways to craft an outline. Outlines can be drafted as a first step in the writing process, any point during the process, or even at the end of the writing to verify the information follows a logical order. The text can be single words, short phrases, or complete sentences, and even sometimes start at a simpler place of short phrases and work toward complete sentences. Remember: the main point is to organize the writing.

## **They can start simply with words or simple phrases.**

- I. Introduction/Thesis
- II. Main Idea
- III. Main Idea
- IV. Main Idea
- V. Conclusion

For example:

- I. Dogs make effective therapy animals.
- II. Human-Animal Bond
- III. Mental Health
- IV. Medical Care
- V. Conclusion

## **They can gain complexity using more details.**

- I. Introduction/Thesis
- II. Main Idea
  - A. Supporting Detail
  - B. Supporting Detail
- III. Main Idea
  - A. Supporting Detail
  - B. Supporting Detail
- IV. Main Idea
  - A. Supporting Detail
  - B. Supporting Detail
- V. Conclusion

For example:

- I. Dogs make effective therapy animals.
- II. Human-Animal Bond
  - A. Bond: thousands of years
  - B. Impact of bond: chemicals released
- III. Mental Health
  - A. Anxiety
  - B. Depression
- IV. Medical Care
  - A. Hospitals
  - B. Assisted Living
- V. Conclusion

**They can add supporting details expanding into complete sentences.**

- I. Introduction/Thesis
- II. Main Idea
  - A. Supporting Detail
    - 1. Sub-point
    - 2. Sub-point
  - B. Supporting Detail
    - 1. Sub-point
    - 2. Sub-point
- III. and IV. follow format of II.
- V. Conclusion

For example:

- I. Dogs make effective therapy animals.
- II. Human-Animal Bond
  - A. Humans bonded with animals thousands of years ago.
    - 1. Dogs were domesticated 10,000 years ago.
    - 2. Dogs were buried with humans.
  - B. Chemicals are released in the brain and regulated in the body when with animals.
    - 1. Oxytocin relieves stress.
    - 2. "Interaction with a friendly companion animal positively affects endocrine responses."
- III. and IV. follow format of II.

**Regarding organization and outlines**, outlines assist writers in determining which way to present information. This is especially helpful with compare and contrast essays or argumentative papers. There are two main ways to organize the information: *block* and *point-by-point* (or alternating).

Block style presents one topic and its points together, followed by the next topic and its points. Point-by-point style presents a point and explains the point from both topics.

Example topic: Comparing and contrasting the piano and the saxophone.

### Block Style:

- I. Pianos and saxophones differ in several ways, but they also share a few key characteristics.
- II. Saxophone
  - A. History
  - B. Type of instrument
  - C. Popularity
- III. Piano
  - A. History
  - B. Type of instrument
  - C. Popularity

Conclusion

### Point-by-point Style:

- I. Pianos and saxophones differ in several ways, but they also share a few key characteristics.
- II. History
  - A. Saxophone
  - B. Piano
- III. Type of instrument
  - A. Saxophone
  - B. Piano
- IV. Popularity
  - A. Saxophone
  - B. Piano
- V. Conclusion

### Instructors may assign a Rogerian argument.

In this style, the writer **objectively examines opposite sides of an issue, presents the arguments accurately and equally, and identifies a compromise**. Some instructors may want the compromise to be the conclusion, and others may want the benefits of the compromise discussed in the conclusion. The LBCC Library website offers a resource called "Opposing Viewpoints" through the Gale Database. This resource provides highlights of issues from both sides and can be a beneficial place to begin.

Example topic: Where to keep cats: inside or outside.

- VI. Introduction/Thesis\*
- VII. First side
  - C. Supporting Detail
  - D. Supporting Detail
- VIII. Second (your) side
  - C. Supporting Detail
  - D. Supporting Detail
- IX. Statement of Compromise

## X. Conclusion – Compromise Benefits

For example:

- I. When one owns a cat, one must decide whether to keep the cat outside or indoors. Some people say cats have outside instincts owners need to support, and others say keeping cats indoors helps them have healthier lives. One must consider both sides for the benefit of all cats.
- II. Cats are better off having outdoor access.
  - A. Mental health is enhanced
  - B. Hunting skills development
- III. Cats live healthier lives as inside beasts.
  - A. Length of lives increased
  - B. Reduce exposure to diseases and parasites
- IV. People can limit outside time to reduce frequency of diseases and parasites and also provide hunting opportunities for cats.
- V. Maintaining a balance of inside and outside exposure can not only offer the skills cats need but can provide long-term benefits to health.

**\* In a Rogerian argument, the thesis acknowledges both sides of the issue, rather than a single side. \***

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