

Research Paper Sentence Outline

This is a *formal outline* for your final policy analysis paper. It will present your major points, and the sub-points supporting each major point. It may have additional levels of sub-sub-points if you feel that is necessary.

The basic idea of a formal outline is that different types of letters or numbers (I, A, 1, a, i) represent different levels of the **hierarchy** of your paper, and sub-levels are indented below main levels. For example:

- I. This is the first main point
 - A. This is the first sub-point under I
 - B. This is the second sub-point under I
 - 1. Sub-point B has its own sub-points
 - 2. But you'd only list them if there were more than one
- II. Here's the second main point
 - A. It has two sub-points
 - B. But this one has no sub-sub points

(If you're using Microsoft Word, you might find yourself getting frustrated by its "helpful" approach to formatting lists. My advice is, don't sweat the formatting too much. I'd prefer that you follow this or a similar format, but the main thing is that the relations among ideas should be clear. The reader should be able to see at a glance which are the main points, which are the secondary points, which are at the third level of importance, and so on. It should also be obvious which secondary points belong under which main points. Usually this is accomplished by using different numbering for different levels, and indenting the less important levels. But if you can't make that work, do whatever you have to so that the relationships are clear.)

Some guidelines for formal outlines are presented in "[Developing an Outline](#)" at the [Purdue University Online Writing Lab](#). Please follow those guidelines when writing your outline.

In addition to the elements of a formal outline, please also:

- **Cite your sources:** list all authors used in each section in parentheses at the end of that section
- Attach a **list of sources** that includes **all the sources used for the outline and no others**. This list may differ from the one you submitted for the Proposal, if you have added new sources or eliminated old ones.

Topic and Sentence Outlines

There are two major types of outline:

- Topic Outline
- Sentence Outline

A **topic** outline lists *words or phrases*. A **sentence** outline lists *complete sentences*.

A **topic** outline arranges your ideas *hierarchically* (showing which are main and which are sub-points), in the *sequence* you want, and shows what you will *talk about*. As the name implies, it identifies all the little mini-topics that your paper will comprise and shows how they relate.

A **sentence** outline does all of this, plus it shows *exactly what you will* say about each mini-topic. Each sentence, instead of simply identifying a mini-topic, is like a *mini-thesis statement* about that mini-topic. It expresses the specific *and complete* idea that that section of the paper will cover as part of proving the overall thesis.

The method described below will produce a *sentence outline*.

Your sentence outline should, if done thoroughly and carefully, represent almost a first draft of your research paper. Once you've written it, the paper will practically write itself. You'll just be filling in the blanks, so to speak—providing specific examples and other support to flesh out and prove the ideas you've already sketched out. The purpose, in other words, of doing this work is not to *make* work for you, but to *save* you work in the long run by breaking the job down into smaller, manageable tasks.

Tip: Outlines can be very detailed or very general, but the more detail you have the farther you'll get toward writing your paper. Here's an example. A paper of 12 pages (about 4,500 words) might have four major topics or points, represented by roman numerals (I - IV) in the outline. This would mean each point would represent about three pages of the final paper. These three pages will include background information, multiple sources, different pieces of evidence and explanation supporting that point, and often a brief description of alternative views and an explanation of why those views are not so convincing. Smaller points supporting each of the main points might then take up a single page, or 2 - 3 paragraphs—again with evidence, explanation, alternative views and so on. Finally, even smaller points under these might correspond to individual paragraphs in the final draft.