Developing an Outline

Background

Once you have narrowed your topic, created a working thesis, and performed some research, you can create an outline to help guide your writing. When you create an outline, there are three important guidelines to keep in mind:

- look for common themes,
- group similar ideas, and
- determine the strongest pieces of evidence.

Structure

How do you begin?

Start by writing down each general idea, or keyword, that you found during the gathering-evidence stage. Under each general idea, add specific details that support it. Your aim is to look for common themes and group similar ideas together. After, you can plan out which main ideas will support your thesis to enable you to see if you have enough evidence for each main idea. If you realize that you do not have enough evidence, you may need to do more research or eliminate a point for one with stronger evidence.

What can the outlining process look like?

Keep in mind that the outline is a guide, so you do not have to stick to the original structure of the outline when you write your

essay. Here are two outline structures you might consider for organizing evidence and your own analysis:

1. The Formal Outline

    List main ideas with Roman numerals, sub points with capital letters, and details with Arabic numerals.

    Example
    Thesis: In Adams' *Money for Life,* the protagonist's isolation and loneliness, products of a money-driven world, are replaced with meaning only when the character is left penniless and fighting for his very survival.

1. Theme of hubris

    1. Protagonist blinded by hubris

        1. Evidence from the text - protagonist was initially unaware of his loneliness and isolation

    2. Protagonist moves beyond hubris only after a life-altering event

        1. Evidence from outside source- bankruptcy is a catalyst for change and the protagonist finding meaning

2. Change in author vocabulary

1. Description of protagonist changes abruptly
    1. Evidence from the text - protagonist's happiness brought about by a drastic event
2. Key words to evoke emotion found towards the end of the story
    1. Evidence from outside source - emotive words emphasize lasting change in the protagonist