5.4 Outlining

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize that an outline allows you to visually see the relationships between ideas for a writing project.
2. Understand that you can create an outline by hand but that using a computer provides useful conveniences.
3. Understand the lettering and numbering system and the indenting system used in outlining.

Your instructor may make decisions about the form your essay will take, dictating whether you are supposed to write in a particular genre. But if you're given some choice or flexibility about form, just as in the case of voice, audience, and message, you need to make the most of that responsibility. Regardless of who dictates form, you or your instructor, know what form your writing should take and make sure it suits the voice, audience, and message. Some common forms of writing include the following:

- Argument
- Book review
- **Case study**
- **Comparative analysis**
- **Critique**
- Informative essay or report
- Lab report
- Opinion essay
- **Personal narrative**
- **Persuasive essay**
- **Proposal**
- Research report

An outline is another way to visually see the relationships between ideas you are gathering. You can create an outline by hand or on a computer. If you create one by hand, leave a blank space so you can fit additional ideas in within different areas. Using a computer for your outline is preferable since you can easily add ideas and move ideas around.

Start with your core idea as the beginning point of the outline. Then use roman numerals to add the subtopics followed by indented capital letters for the details. If you add finer details, you can use further-indented numbers for the next level and even-further-indented lowercase letters for a level after that. When using a computer, the preset tabs are most likely fine for the indenting.

The outline below relates to the map from the last section. It is simply another way to accomplish the same process of idea gathering. Notice that the writer here has made a **sentence outline** by writing out each element in a complete sentence. This strategy will help this writer move more easily from outline to essay draft.

The Sturgis Motorcycle Rally as Part of the Identity of Sturgis and the Surrounding Area

1. Bike Week has been going on for more than seventy years.

    1. It is an automatic assumption by locals that Bike Week will be held each year.
    2. Most locals have never known life without Bike Week.

2. Bike Week is a key element of area finances.

    1. Millions of dollars flow into the area economy.
    2. Sturgis and the surrounding cities have invested heavily in the function.
    3. Although the actual Bike Week is a central focus, bikers come here for months on either side of the week to ride the famous routes.

3. The area has grown and developed around Bike Week.

    1. Every small town has a Harley-Davidson store.
    2. Merchants continually create new products to sell to bikers.
    3. The locals are very accepting and supportive of the bikers.

4. People around the world recognize Sturgis for Bike Week.

    1. People attend Bike Week from all fifty states and many other countries.
    2. Although Sturgis has only a few thousand people, the town is known around the world.

As with the mapping process, once you have included all the ideas you have, take a break and return to your outline later. If, in the meantime, a thought comes to you, take a minute to add it. When you are satisfied with your outline, use it to guide your writing process. However, keep in mind that your outline is only a tool you are using, and you will vary from it when you have other ideas along the way.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Outlining uses roman numerals, numbers, letters, and indenting to visually show how ideas are related.
- You can create an outline by hand, but using a computer gives you much greater flexibility to add ideas and move ideas around.

- Within an outline, the numbering/lettering order is as follows:

    - I.
    - A.
    - 1.
    - a.

EXERCISES

1. Using a topic of interest to you, create an idea outline for a short paper.

2. Using a word processing program, present the following information in a short outline using at least two roman numerals and at least two capital letters. You will have to reorder the ideas so they make sense.

- Topic: Technology should be a part of current-day education from kindergarten through all levels of college.

- Ideas:

  People need a natural comfort with technology before entering the workplace.

  Students think in a technological way, so it's wrong to pull them backward at school.

  Students live in a technology age, so they should be educated in a technology age.

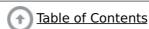 Students expect technology at school.

  Students must experience using technology rather than just being told about it.

  Even sixteen-year-olds are expected to be comfortable with computers on their very first jobs.

  Most students use some types of technology at home.

  Jobs ranging from waitresses to mechanics to nurses to lawyers require computer use.