

## Outlines—Why bother?

- It's easier! By creating an outline, you are pre-writing . . . So, when you sit down to actually begin writing the paper, you already have quite a bit to build on. You're not starting from scratch!
  - ▣ I HATE sitting in front of a blank screen to start a new paper. Outlining lets you avoid that overwhelming experience.
  - ▣ Also, you probably won't procrastinate as much because you've created a do-able task for yourself.

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## Outlines—Why bother?

- Your papers will be better.
  - ▣ Papers written at the last minute are rarely good.
  - ▣ Outlines help you to organize your thoughts in a logical order, identify "holes" in your logic, and remove redundancies.
  - ▣ This should have lots of benefits—better grades, papers accepted for publication, etc.

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## Getting Started

- Open a Word document (Once you're done with the outline, you can use it to start your first draft!)
- Identify the main points (key arguments, big ideas) you want to make in your paper.
  - ▣ Order, reorder, & revise them as needed so that you have a logical progression of ideas.
    - Again, easier when you can cut & paste in a Word doc!
  - ▣ Add in-text citations wherever you can at this point!
    - Another good idea is to just start your Reference page now!
- NOTE: This is hard work & will take some time to get right, so don't be discouraged.

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## Refining Your Outline

- Take each main idea and identify points that you need to make in order to support the main idea.
  - ▣ Supporting the main idea = Adding details & examples that make your argument stronger, more specific, etc.
    - This is NOT re-stating the main idea!
- Under each main idea, order, reorder, & revise your supporting thoughts so that you have a logical progression of ideas.

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## Critical Feedback & Revision

- I recommend getting critical feedback after you have a good "draft outline."
- This can be from yourself, but . . .
  - ▣ Make sure you take some time away from it, so that you can look at it with "fresh eyes;"
  - ▣ Also, be sure to think CRITICALLY about your work . . . What needs to be changed/improved/deleted?
  - ▣ Consider: Does the outline make logical sense? How can I make a stronger argument? Are there areas that I need to research more?

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## Critical Feedback & Revision

- I really recommend that you "talk through" your outline to someone who knows the field well enough to ask good questions & give you critical feedback.
  - ▣ What you have written might make perfect sense to you, but not to someone else . . . And, ultimately, your audience is someone else!
  - ▣ Talking through your outline will help you to improve (or identify holes in) your logic and transitions from one idea to the next.
  - ▣ They might challenge some of your assumptions or add some ideas you hadn't thought of . . . All good things!

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## Writing for Classes/Publication

- Read & follow the directions!!
  - In classes, that's your rubric
  - For thesis/dissertation papers, talk with your advisor
  - For publication, that's the author/submission guidelines for the journal
- For the latter two, find good examples to follow.
  - If you're writing a traditional research article, the structure is already there! (see sample paper in APA Manual, p. 41)
  - If it's not a traditional research article, find articles similar to what you want to write to be exemplars.

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## My Recommendations

- Don't worry about what type of outline you use. To me, the main point is that you find a system that works for you, and that you use it.
- Get something down on paper & fix it later. Don't worry about it being perfect right now—it's not going to be.
- Give yourself time. I find that if I get started on something ahead of time, new ideas about it will come to me when I'm driving, walking, etc.

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## Reverse Outlining

Some good questions for when you've written a draft:

- Does every paragraph relate back to your main idea?
- Where might a reader have trouble following the order of your ideas?
- Do several of your paragraphs repeat one idea?
- Does one paragraph juggle several topics?
- Are your paragraphs too long? Too short?
  - How can you tell?
    - from <http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/ReverseOutlines.html>

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