Organize major ideas in formal or informal outlines

Using your working thesis and major ideas, you can develop an outline to organize your project.

For an overview of related key topics on planning a paper, visit the videos and quizzes in this tutorial.

Explore It

Once you’ve drafted a working thesis and conducted preliminary research, you need to organize your ideas and evidence. In order to see how the evidence you have collected supports your points, take time to organize your ideas. Some writers start by simply drafting a list of key points and ideas. Some writers create a formal outline to tentatively organize their ideas. Others write a rough draft first and then create a formal outline afterward to clarify and examine the organization of the research paper.

A useful working outline for a research project describes your thesis statement first, followed by the main ideas for the draft, each supported by evidence, data, or other details.

Excerpt from a Tentative Outline

- **Thesis statement**: The growing number of people with compulsions to play video games and use other digital technologies suggests that medical and mental health workers need clear and consistent guidelines for treatment of people with pathological usage problems.

  - The American Psychiatric Association needs to define compulsive use of games and other technologies as an addiction and recommend treatment.

  - A growing body of research reveals a small but distressing number of gamers who overuse.
  
    - The APA concluded more research is needed and declined to include video game addiction as a new disorder in the DSM.
  
  - A growing number of users of games and related technologies are seeking treatment for their excessive use.

    - Among populations at risk, university students are thought to be especially vulnerable due to their access to high-speed broadband, their flexible hours, and social stresses.

    - In South Korea where high-speed Internet access is prevalent, hospitals and other centers have begun to offer treatment for Internet addiction.

Learn It

Whether you decide to use a formal outline or a simple plan listing your main points and evidence, taking the time to organize your project in this way will help you keep the research paper focused and on track. When you outline you create a tool to help you analyze your ideas and how they relate to one another. Using an outline helps you see whether any of your points are out of order. It can also highlight points that need more evidence, examples, or support.
GUIDELINES FOR CREATING FORMAL OUTLINES

- Begin by giving your thesis statement.
- Include indented levels that are numbered and lettered.
- All items in an outline should always be written in parallel form, capitalized and either in complete sentences or in grammatically matching shortened phrases.
- Within the outline, items at the same level of indentation and with the same level of numbering or lettering should be at the same level of detail or specificity.
- At each level of the outline include at least two items (no level includes an A without a B, and so on). All headings in the outline should be able to be divided logically into two parts. If not, recheck your heading against the heading above it for relevance or to see whether it should be combined.
- If you are assigned a formal outline as part of a research project, ask your instructor for specific formatting guidelines.

Thesis Statement

I. First main idea
   A. Subordinate idea
      1. Supporting detail
      2. Supporting detail
      3. Supporting detail
   B. Subordinate idea
      1. Supporting detail
      2. Supporting detail

II. Second main idea
   A. Subordinate idea
   B. Subordinate idea

Use It

Using a current research project, begin with your working thesis and draft an informal working outline. Make sure that each point you make supporting your thesis has at least two separate pieces of evidence or details to support it. As you draft your outline, refer back to the assignment for your research project, making sure that the organization you use for your outline reflects any directions included from your instructor. Look for key words in the assignment that point to a particular organization.