



Success Center Tips for Preparing an Outline

Outlines aid the writing process by providing an overview of the writer's arguments. An outline helps writers arrange their ideas in order and shows the audience how ideas are logically related. Before creating an outline, determine the purpose, audience and thesis statement for the assignment. Next, engage in some initial invention strategies, like brainstorming or clustering, to determine the major ideas you want to discuss. Then decide how you wish to order the ideas, e.g., from general to specific, or from abstract to concrete.

Sample Outline

Thesis statement: Instant messaging seems to be a beneficial force in the development of youth literacy because it promotes regular contact with words, the use of written medium for communication, and the development of an alternative form of literacy.

- I. Decline of youth literacy—overview
 - A. What many parents, librarians, educators believe
 - B. Instant messaging (IMing) as possible cause
 - 1. Definition of IMing
 - 2. Example of IM conversation
 - 3. IMing as beneficial to youth literacy
- II. Two background issues
 - A. Current state of literacy
 - 1. Decline in SAT test scores
 - 2. Decline in writing ability
 - B. Prevalence on IMing
 - 1. Statistics indicating widespread usage
 - 2. Instant messagers using new vocabulary
- III. My field research to verify existence of IM language
 - A. Explanation of how research was done
 - B. Results of research
 - 1. Four types of IM language: phonetic replacements, acronyms, abbreviations, inanities
 - 2. Frequency of IM language use in IM writing
 - 3. Conclusions about vocabulary
- IV. What critics of IMing say
 - A. Many problems with student writing, such as incomplete sentences, grammar, and spelling
 - B. Students using outline abbreviations (smileys) in formal papers
- V. What linguists and other supporters of IMing say
 - A. Traditional literacy not harmed by IMing
 - B. IM use indicative of advanced literacy
 - 1. Crystal's explanation of metalinguistics and wordplay
 - 2. Human ability to write in many styles, IM style being only one alternative
 - 3. IMing helping students shift from language to language

Each major heading receives a Roman numeral (I, II, III, IV, etc.) and is grammatically parallel (equal) to the other major headings. In this example, noun phrases are used. All heading information should have the same significance.

*Subheadings also use parallel structure ("decline in" and "types of"). Some outlines may use **full sentences** rather than **phrases**. Each heading and subheading must have at least 2 parts (heading I. must have a II.; subheading A. must have a B.; subheading I. must have a 2., etc.).*

Major headings contain more general information, while the information in subheadings is more specific and detailed to break down the main ideas.

An outline should present ideas in a logical order and show relationships between your ideas in each section.

Note: Many software programs can automatically set up an outline format as you type – see pg. 3 of this handout for details.

Sources: "Developing an Outline." *The Purdue OWL Family of Sites*. The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue U, 2018.

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/the_writing_process/developing_an_outline/documents/20081113013048_544.pdf. Accessed 28 Aug. 2018.

Lunsford, Andrea A. *The St. Martin's Handbook*. 6th ed., Bedford, 2008. See pp. 295-296.

Speech Outlines

Instructors may ask students to include special types of information in a speech outline. One brief example of speech outline format is provided on this page. Detailed sample outlines corresponding to specific kinds of speeches are often included in the assigned textbook for the class. Always consult your instructor's assignment guidelines or class notes as formats may be different.

Sample Informative Speech Outline

General Goal: To inform

Specific Goal: I want my audience to understand the benefits of volunteering

Thesis statement: College students who participate in volunteer work experience important professional, personal, and community benefits.

Introduction

- I.
- II.
- III.
- IV.

Transition sentence to connect ideas

Body

- I.
 - A.
 - B.

Transition sentence to connect ideas

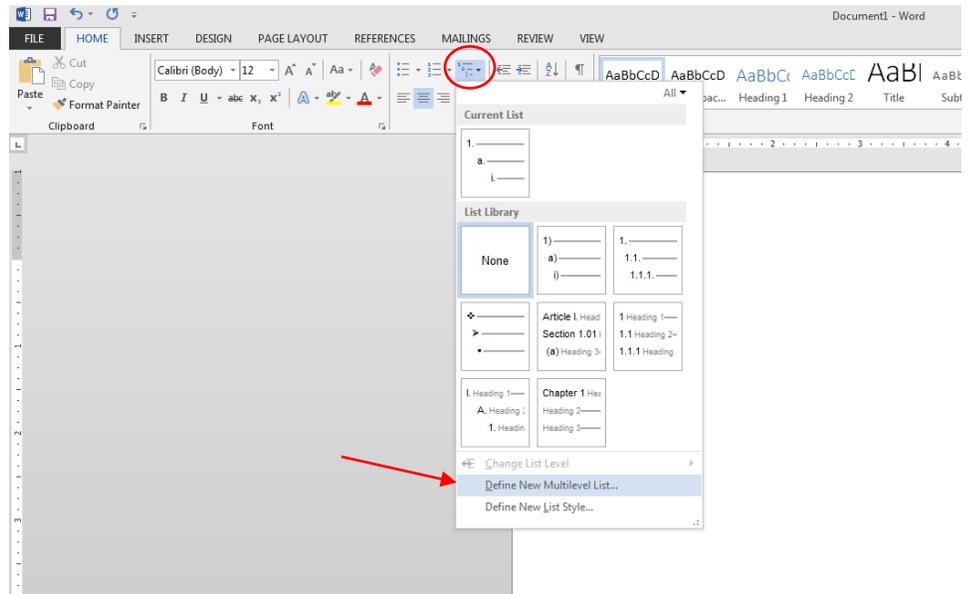
- II.
 - A.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - B.

Conclusion

- I. Today we have discussed....
- II. So, I'm hoping the next time you recall a time when you enjoyed making a difference in someone else's life....

Creating a Multilevel List in Word 2016 for Formal Academic Outlines

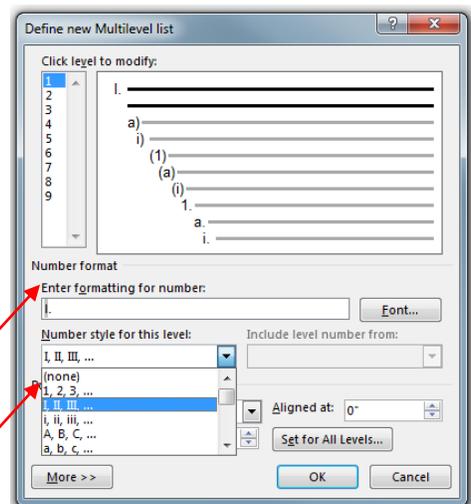
1. Set desired font, font size, and line spacing. Times New Roman 12 pt. font with double-spacing is the norm. Make sure **“Normal”** typing style is selected rather than **“Heading 1”** or another style.
2. On the toolbar of the Home ribbon, select the drop down menu for **“Multilevel List.”** Go to **“Define New Multilevel List”** near the bottom of the menu.



3. First, select **“Number style for this level.”** The first level should be Roman numerals (I. II. III.), the second level should be capital letters (A. B. C.), and the third level should be Arabic numerals (1. 2. 3.).
4. As you select the number style for each level, in the **“Enter formatting for number”** area, make sure there is a **period after the number or letter** and not a parenthesis. After you have set each level (at least the first three), press **“OK.”**

Step 4

Step 3



5. Roman numeral **I.** should appear in your document. Type anything to hold the place and hit Enter. Word will automatically create the next Roman numeral, **II.** Hit Tab, and Word will automatically create the 2nd level in the list with the letter **A.** Type, press Enter and Tab again, and Word will automatically create the 3rd level, **1.**
6. Go back to the levels you have created and add the necessary information for your outline. See reverse for guidance on what to write in your headings and subheadings.

Navigating between Levels

If you are on a subheading and want to create a higher-level heading below it, hit Enter, press Tab, then backspace to the desired level.