

# LAL100 Introduction to Communication Skills

## Handout: Outlining Strategies

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Outlining your first draft by listing each paragraph's topic sentence can be an easy way to ensure that each of your paragraphs is serving a specific purpose in your paper. You may find opportunities to combine or eliminate potential paragraphs when outlining—first drafts often contain repetitive ideas or sections that stall, rather than advance, the paper's central argument.

Additionally, if you are having trouble revising a paper, making an outline of each paragraph and its topic sentence after you have written your paper can be an effective way of identifying a paper's strengths and weaknesses.

### Example Outline

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*The following outline is for a 5–7 pages paper discussing the link between educational attainment and health.*

#### I. Introduction

**A. Current Problem:** Educational attainment rates are decreasing in the United States while healthcare costs are increasing.

**B. Population/Area of Focus:** Unskilled or low-skilled adult workers

**C. Key Terms:** healthy, well-educated

**Thesis Statement:** *Because of their income deficit (cite sources) and general susceptibility to depression (cite sources), students who drop out of high school before graduation maintain a higher risk for physical and mental health problems later in life.*

#### II. Background

**A. Historical Employment Overview:** Unskilled laborers in the past were frequently unionized and adequately compensated for their work (cite sources).

**B. Historical Healthcare Overview:** Unskilled laborers in the past were often provided adequate healthcare and benefits (cite sources).

**C. Current Link between Education and Employment Type:** Increasingly, uneducated workers work in unskilled or low-skilled jobs (cite sources).

**D. Gaps in the Research:** Little information exists exploring the health implications of the current conditions in low-skilled jobs.

#### III. Major Point 1: Conditions of employment affect workers' physical health.

**A. Minor Point 1:** Unskilled work environments are correlated highly with worker injury (cite sources).

**B. Minor Point 2:** Unskilled work environments rarely provide healthcare or adequate injury recovery time (cite sources).

#### IV. Major Point 2: Conditions of employment affect workers' mental health

**A. Minor Point 1:** Employment in a low-skilled position is highly correlated with dangerous levels of stress (cite sources).

**B. Minor Point 2:** Stress is highly correlated with mental health issues (cite sources).

**V. Major Point 3: Physical health and mental health correlate directly with one another.**

- A. **Minor Point 1:** Mental health problems and physical health problems are highly correlated (cite sources).
- B. **Minor Point 2:** Stress manifests itself in physical form (cite sources)

#### VI. Major Point 4: People with more financial worries have more stress and worse physical health.

- A. **Minor Point 1:** Many high-school dropouts face financial problems (cite sources).
- B. **Minor Point 2:** Financial problems are often correlated with unhealthy lifestyle choices such as unhealthy food choices, overconsumption/abuse of alcohol, chain smoking, abusive relationships, etc. (cite sources).

#### VII. Conclusion

- A. **Restatement of Thesis:** Students who drop out of high school are at a higher risk for both mental and physical health problems throughout their lives.
- B. **Next Steps:** Society needs educational advocates; educators need to be aware of this situation and strive for student retention in order to promote healthy lifestyles and warn students of the risks associated with dropping out of school.

### Introduction/Context

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Your introduction provides context to your readers to prepare them for your paper's argument or purpose. An introduction should begin with discussion of your specific topic (not a broad background overview) and provide just enough context (definitions of key terms, for example) to prepare your readers for your thesis or purpose statement.

**Sample Introduction/Context:** If the topic of your paper is the link between educational attainment and health, your introduction might do the following: (a) establish the population you are discussing, (b) define key terms such as *healthy* and *well-educated*, or (c) justify the discussion of this topic by pointing out a connection to a current problem that your paper will help address.

### Thesis/Purpose Statement

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A thesis or purpose statement should come at the end of your introduction and state clearly and concisely what the purpose or central argument of your paper is. The introduction prepares your reader for this statement, and the rest of the paper follows in support of it.

**Sample Thesis Statement:** Because of their income deficit (Smith, 2010) and general susceptibility to depression (Jones, 2011), students who drop out of high school before graduation maintain a higher risk for physical and mental health problems later in life.

### Background

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After the initial introduction, background on your topic often follows. This paragraph or section might include a literature review surveying the current state of knowledge on your topic or simply a historical overview of relevant information. The purpose of this section is to justify your own project or paper by pointing out a gap in the current research which your work will address.

**Sample Background:** A background section on a paper on education and health might include an overview of recent research in this area, such as research on depression or on decreasing high school graduation rates.

### Major & Minor Points

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*Major points* are the building blocks of your paper. Major points build on each other, moving the paper forward and toward its conclusion. Each major point should be a clear claim that relates to the central argument of your paper.

**Sample Major Point:** Employment and physical health may be a good first major point for this sample paper. Here, a student might discuss how dropping out of high school often leads to fewer employment opportunities, and those employment opportunities that are available tend to be correlated with poor work environments and low pay.

*Minor points* are subtopics within your major points. Minor points develop the nuances of your major points but may not be significant enough to warrant extended attention on their own. These may come in the form of statistics, examples from your sources, or supporting ideas.

**Sample Minor Point:** A sample minor point of the previous major point (employment and physical health) might address worker injury or the frequent lack of health insurance benefits offered by low-paying employers.

The rest of the body of your paper will be made up of more major and minor points. Each major point should advance the paper's central argument, often building on the previous points, **until you have provided enough evidence and analysis to justify your paper's conclusion.**

**More Major and Minor Points:** In this paper, more major points might include mental health of high school dropouts, healthcare access for dropouts, and correlation between mental and physical health. Minor topics could include specific work environments, job satisfaction in various fields, and correlation between depression and chronic illness.

## Conclusion

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Your conclusion both restates your paper's major claim and ties that claim into a larger discussion. Rather than simply reiterating each major and minor point, quickly revisit your thesis statement and focus on ending the paper by tying your thesis into current research in your field, next steps for other researchers, your broader studies, or other future implications.

**Sample Conclusion:** For this paper, a conclusion might restate the central argument (the link between lack of education and health issues) and go on to connect that discussion to a larger discussion of the U.S. healthcare or education systems.