

Rules for a Clear Outline

A. An outline is all about dividing things. This is a key to understanding what an outline does. Every main point should be part of the thesis. Every sub-point should be part of its main point.

B. Form

1. Use complete declarative sentences:
 - a. Do not use questions—use questions only as transition to a main point.
 - b. Do not use phrases—you will have to use complete sentences when you write—word them out in the outline.
2. Use parallel structure:
 - a. Apply the same sentence structure for each point.
 - b. Set up a pattern of repetitive structure that the audience can follow.
3. Use consistent outlining symbols and indentation.

C. Logic

1. Each point should be all-inclusive and mutually exclusive—without stray points and overlap.
2. Each point should express a single idea.
3. All points on the same level should be of equivalent importance and kind.
4. Two to five points on any given level should present a comprehensive picture of your ideas.
 - a. If you have less than two points, you have not divided the point.
Remember: an outline is all about dividing.
 - b. If you have more than five points,
 1. You may have some problem in the logic:
 - There are probably strays.
 - There is probably overlap.
 2. Your readers will find your points difficult to remember.
 3. You should try regrouping points into fewer categories.