

RESEARCH PAPER OUTLINE: A GUIDE

Outlines help control the flow of a paper. They provide a “skeleton” for the paper that helps with organization and structure.

Each point in an outline should relate back to the main topic and claim of the paper’s thesis statement. It should follow the organizing principle set up in the thesis. **Each reason in the organizing principle constitutes its own argument, so each principle should have a separate paragraph or section within the paper.**

See “Introduction & Conclusion Paragraphs” for help with outlining the introduction (context, key themes, problem to be addressed, thesis statements, etc.) and the conclusion (restated thesis, summarized points, call to action, etc.).

CREATING AN OUTLINE

1. **Build an outline using the thesis statement as the foundation:** “Consumers prefer waffles to pancakes [claim] because of their **density, texture, and flavor** [organizing principle].”
2. **Start each main point in an outline with a claim.** The claim is the main argument that the paper will discuss. Then, add **reasons** to support this claim. The reasons flow from the organizing principle and will help give the paper shape. As a result, the outline should follow the flow of the organizing principle.
3. Each numeral (I, II, III, etc.) should denote a separate paragraph or section of the paper. Use research to supply evidence that supports each **reason** (a., i., ii., b., i., ii., etc.).
4. Include citations within the outline to keep track of information and avoid plagiarism.

EXAMPLE OUTLINE

- I. Consumers prefer waffles to pancakes because of their density. (Reason 1)
 - a. People enjoy food with lighter density in the morning because it aids digestion.
 - i. Three different studies show that, in the morning hours, people will choose food with lighter density 75% of the time (Johnson 43). (EVIDENCE)
 - ii. Men tend to eat breakfast more often than women; however, women choose breakfast food with lighter density 87% of the time (King 134-35). (EVIDENCE)
- II. Consumers prefer waffles to pancakes because of their texture. (Reason 2)
 - a. In blind taste tests, people tend to prefer foods with more diverse texture.
 - i. Studies show that diverse texture in food is generally more pleasing than food with bland textures (Smith 34). (EVIDENCE)
 - ii. People who eat food with more complex textures tend to have better digestion (White 134). (EVIDENCE)

PRACTICE NOW