

## **CREATING AN OUTLINE**

### **Regis Writing Center**

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An outline is an important organizational tool in the writing process. It guides writers from point to point, showing the relationship of various concepts to the thesis of the paper. This, in turn, often shows where paragraphs and transitions may be needed.

Before creating an outline, it is important to form a tentative thesis. Once this step is completed, an informal outline, which is simply a thesis followed by a list of supporting material, can be sketched. For many writers, an informal outline is enough to guide them through the writing process. However, in some cases it may be necessary to create a formal outline in order to organize complex information, to show the relative importance of the essay's elements and how they connect to each other.

#### **RULES FOR A FORMAL OUTLINE:**

1. A thesis statement should appear at the top of the outline.
2. Use conventional systems of numbers and letters as well as indentations to indicate the relative importance and order of the material: Roman numerals indicate major divisions. Capital letters, Arabic numerals, and lower case letters indicate further subsections of evidence and must be set off by indentations.
3. Sections and subsections must reflect logical arguments that support the thesis.
4. Each subdivision must have at least two parts (if there is a 1, there must be a 2; if there is an A, there must be a B).
5. Limit the number of major sections in the outline. If the list of Roman numerals becomes too long, cluster items into broader major sections with more sub-categories.
6. Headings must be expressed in parallel grammatical form. For instance, use all single nouns, all single verbs, all gerund phrases, all prepositional phrases, or all complete sentences.
7. Use sentences unless phrases or words are clear.
8. An introduction and conclusion may be omitted from the outline but must be included in the essay.

## SAMPLE OUTLINE

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Thesis: Hot cocoa is a great treat on a winter day, but it is important to follow some basic steps in order to insure the best tasting hot cocoa.

- I. The first step is to gather the ingredients and utensils.
  - A. Gather ingredients from the kitchen or grocery store.
    1. Hot cocoa mix
    2. Water or milk
    3. Marshmallows
  - B. Gather the necessary utensils.
    1. Kettle
    2. Mug
    3. Spoon
- II. The second step is to prepare the ingredients.
  - A. Boil the water or milk in the kettle.
  - B. Pour the hot cocoa mix into the mug.
- III. The third step is to mix the ingredients.
  - A. Pour the boiling water into the mug.
  - B. Stir the mixture with the spoon.
  - C. Add marshmallows to the top.
- IV. The last step is to enjoy the hot cocoa.
  - A. Let the cocoa cool so you will not burn your tongue.
  - B. Find a comfortable chair.
  - C. Drink the hot cocoa.