

Developing an Outline

An outline is like a grocery list. While shopping with a list you can organize and prioritize items—for example, you can buy everything you need in the frozen food section instead of wasting time picking things up piecemeal. Like a grocery list, an outline builds a framework a writer can use to guide her through a paper.

Some skip outlines because they think outlines are busywork rather than *part of* the writing process – but the benefits of an outline far outweigh the time needed to make one. After all, an outline need not be “fancy” or terribly complex. The outline’s purpose is simply to help make organizational and structural sense of a paper *before* it begins. The following are a few ideas to consider as you develop an outline:

Tips on developing an outline

- Start general and work toward the specific
- You can begin an outline anytime—even before the scope of a project is fully realized
- If possible, allow time between outlining and writing your paper
- Shape your outline in a way that is interesting for you
- Share your outline with a friend before starting to write
- Unless your outline is an assignment, it doesn’t have to be “perfect”

Example of a basic outline

- I. Transforming chaos into order
 - A. Definitions of chaos and order
 1. Etymology and historical views
 - B. Chaos as a social problem
 1. Inner and outer chaos
 2. Social problems are chaos
 3. Amount and intensity of chaos is increasing
 - C. Transforming chaos
 1. Why transformation, not destruction
 - a. intangible things are indestructible
 - b. chaos is a mind thing
- II. Methods of transformation
 - A. Increase understanding
 1. Ways of understanding
 - B. Decrease confusion
 1. Ways of decreasing confusion
 - C. Maintaining a healthy balance between inner and outer worlds
- III. Conclusion – “Chaos needs to be properly understood”
 - A. Misunderstanding chaos is not an option
 1. Confusion breeds discontent ; discontent breeds violence
 2. Outer peace requires reducing inner discontent, reducing inner discontent requires more understanding