



The **SPEAKING & WRITING** Center

Creating a Basic Outline

This is a very basic outline that you can use to get started with either a presentation or a writing assignment. Too often, when we approach speaking & writing, we think in terms of a complete product—not in terms of an outline. It's extremely important to begin every task with a clear and thorough outline. Your audience will only be able to follow your paper or speech if it is very clearly organized.

For speaking, develop most of the outline with key words in order to assure that you will extemporize and talk to your audience; you should write your thesis statement, transition sentences, and all main point statements as complete sentences (and deliver them as written) so that you have a speech that is easy to follow. Keep in mind that when you present a written work (like a term paper) you cannot present the entire paper. You need to make decisions about what information is most important for your audience, what is most useful, what will be easiest to understand? Think about your time limits. It's generally best to stick to 3-5 main points. Your audience will appreciate your efforts to organize your thoughts.

For writing, the same basic rules apply: keep it simple by sticking to key words and general ideas about which you can expand upon later, limit your essay to 3-5 main ideas, and clearly state your thesis/argument. When developing a outline for an essay, you can start from the outline and develop it into a working essay. After you have the key words, start to build each section with research and your own ideas. Eventually, you will have a well-structured, clear essay.

I. Introduction

- A. Attention getter—pull the audience in with something interesting (a story, interesting stats, a quotation, etc.)
- B. Establish credibility/build relationship with the audience—why are you speaking on this topic?
- C. Introduction of topic—give them a brief glimpse at what you are talking about, maybe some background info. that they need for the speech.
- D. Thesis statement: one clear sentence that previews all your main points in the appropriate order.

(transition: one complete sentence that makes the transition to the next part of the speech)

- II. (Main point statement) One clear statement that tells the audience what this section is about.
- A. Subpoint (that supports the above main point; this is just for form—you have to decide how many subpoints and sub-subpoints that you have in each section)
 - 1. Sub-subpoint (that supports the above subpoint)
 - a. Support material (that supports the above subpoint; examples, sources)
 - b. Support material
 - 2. Sub-subpoint
 - a. Support material
 - b. Support material
 - c. Support material
 - B. Subpoint
 - C. Subpoint

(transition:)

- III. (Main point statement) One clear statement that tells the audience what this section is about.
- A. Subpoint
 - 1. Sub-subpoint
 - a. Support material
 - b. Support material
 - 2. Sub-subpoint
 - a. Support material
 - b. Support material
 - B. Subpoint
 - 1. Sub-subpoint
 - 2. Sub-subpoint
 - C. Subpoint

(transition:)

- IV. (Main point statement) One clear statement that tells the audience what this section is about.
- A. Subpoint
 - 1. Sub-subpoint
 - a. Support material
 - 2. Sub-subpoint
 - B. Subpoint
 - C. Subpoint

(transition:)

V. Conclusion

- A. Summary (what do you want the audience to remember after the speech is over?)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

B. Closer—you need to have a strong ending. It often works well to refer back to your attention getter, to end with a strong quotation, to create a strong image, etc.

