



UNIVERSITY OF
Global Health
EQUITY

Writing
Center



Outlining

An outline is a map of your essay. It shows what information each section or paragraph will contain, and in what order.

Why create an outline?

Outlining is a tool we use in the writing process to help organize our ideas, visualize our paper's potential structure, and to further flesh out and develop points. It allows the writer to understand how he or she will connect information to support the thesis statement and the claims of the paper. An outline provides the writer with a space to consider ideas easily without needing to write complete paragraphs or sentences.

Creating your outline:

Before beginning an outline, it is useful to have a clear thesis statement or clear purpose or argument, as everything else in the outline is going to work to support the thesis. Note: the outline might help inform the thesis, and therefore your thesis might change or develop within the outlining process.

Organize your outline in whatever format fits into the structure needed for the type of paper you are writing. One common outline format uses Roman numerals, letters, and numbers. Other outlines can use bullet points or other symbols. You can use whatever organizational patterns work best for you and your paper, as long as you understand your own organizational tools. Outlines can be written using complete sentences or fragments or a mix of the two.

Remember!

After creating your outline, you may decide to reorganize your ideas by putting them in a different order. Furthermore, as you are writing you might make some discoveries and can, of course, always adjust or deviate from the outline as needed.

Sample Outline:

Outlines can look quite different. You might use Roman numerals to indicate the main point or function of that section, and then letters to indicate separate sub-points, and then even bullet points or numbers to indicate specific information, like using certain quotes, sources, evidence, or examples.

Essay Outline

Title: Birth Control Pills: a Blessing or a Curse?

Thesis: Although there are some disadvantages, birth control pills are safe.

Purpose: To demystify misconceptions surrounding the use of birth control pills.

Summary of key points: Pills contain no harmful chemicals, have health benefits and are the most misjudged method of birth control.

I. Introduction

- A. Hook: Janka's Story (The 24-year-old unmarried Janka is worried to the core and scared stiff as she awaits her pregnancy test result. One second may change her whole life, and she could become the mother of an unwanted child.)
- B. Background: Statistics to demonstrate the magnitude of the problem.
- C. Summary of points: Pills contain no harmful chemicals, have health benefits and are the most misjudged method of birth control.
- D. Thesis Statement: Although there are some disadvantages, birth control pills are safe.

II. Topic sentence: Pills contain nothing harmful to women's health.

- A. Pills contain hormones produced by women's bodies.
 - 1. Combination (estrogen+progestin) and progestin-only (Planned Parenthood, 2003)
 - 2. Estrogen – activates the uterus, thickens walls. Progesterone – helps the uterus accept egg (National Cancer Institute, 2003)
- B. Pills give women the right amount of hormones so they can't get pregnant
 - 1. Estrogen pill stops egg production, progestin pill will “thicken cervical mucus” so no fertilization (Planned Parenthood, 2003, Basics section, para. 2)
 - 2. Hormones “fool the body into acting as if it's pregnant” (Alice, 1998)

III. **Topic sentence: Taking birth control pills has benefits for women's health.**

A. Improves the skin

1. less acne, less “excess” hair (Greenfield, 2004a)

B. Other benefits are fewer ovarian cysts, and less likelihood of anemia (Greenfield, 2004a)

C. Less painful menstruation

1. not so many cramps, lighter flow (Planned Parenthood, 2003)

IV. **Topic sentence: Myths about birth control pills are wrong.**

A. Birth control pills do not cause ovarian cancer.

1. On the contrary, birth control pills help fight against cancer.

a. Progestin pill caused “increased cell turnover in the ovarian epithelium, indicating that progestin might lower ovarian cancer risk by activating cancer-preventative molecular pathways in the ovary – Duke Comprehensive Cancer Center (“Oral contraceptives,” 2002). More cell turnover means pre-cancerous cells are destroyed earlier and faster.

b. Women who took pills with more progestin had a lower risk of ovarian cancer than women on pills with more estrogen, but all women taking the pill had lower risk of ovarian cancer than other women (“Oral contraceptives,” 2002)

C. Some doctors even advise women to take the pill for five years because of its benefits in preventing ovarian cancer (Greenfield, 2004b)

V. **Topic sentence: The longer women use pills, the more protection they have against ovarian cancer.**

A. Women who used pills for 1 year had 10-12% less chance of ovarian cancer.

B. Women who use it for 5 years decrease risk of ovarian cancer by 50%. – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Harvard Medical School (National Cancer Institute, 2003)

C. Pill can especially help women with ovarian cancer in family history.

VI. **Conclusion**

A. Restatement of the thesis

B. Overview of points.

C. Call to action

Excerpt from Ann Whitaker's (2009, September) Academic Writing Guide: A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing Academic Papers. <http://www.vsm.sk/Curriculum/academicsupport/academicwritingguide.pdf>

Read the full essay from the above outline [here](#).

Other insights are adapted From:

Los Angeles Valley College Writing Center, "How to Make an Outline" 2/2/15 Northwestern University Collaborative Learning and Integrated Mentoring in the Biosciences, "A Basic Proposal Outline"

San Jose State University Writing Center. (2014). "Essay Planning: Outlining with a Purpose" Spring 2014