

## Instructions for Standard Topic Outline Form

You will submit a topic outline prior to submitting your paper as well as with your paper. A topic outline consists of words and phrases, **not sentences**.

According to the MLA, numbering, indentation, punctuation, and other physical aspects of outlines follow specific rules. When you are required to turn in an outline with your paper, use the type of outline your instructor specifies and put it in standard form. Most word-processing programs can assist you in setting up your outline correctly.

### Numbering and Indentation

Make the numbering of your headings consistent throughout.

**There can not be any single heading: If there is a "I," there must be a "II." If there is an "A," there must be a "B."**

This is the correct method for numbering and indenting a topic outline:

Thesis statement: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (sentence statement)

I. . . . . (Roman numeral for main head)

A. . . . . (Capital letter for subhead)

1. . . . . (Arabic numeral for

2. . . . . second subhead)

a. . . . . (lowercase letter for

b. . . . . third subhead)

B. . . . .

II. . . . .

- The main headings (I,II,III...) are set next to the left hand margin.
- The subheadings are indented.
- When a heading runs over one line, the second line is indented as far as the first word of the preceding line:

I. Present need for physicists

A. In private industry

B. In government projects

### Punctuation and Capitalization

In a topic outline, capitalize only the first letter of the word beginning the heading (and all proper nouns).

Do not put any punctuation at the end because these headings are not complete sentences.

### **Incorrect**

I. Present Need for Physicists.

A. In Private Industry.

B. In Government Projects.

### **Correct**

I. Present need for physicists

A. In private industry

B. In government projects

### **Content of Headings**

Each heading in an outline should be specific and meaningful. Headings such as "Introduction," "Body," and "Conclusion" are not useful. Putting headings in the form of questions or in statements that will have to be filled in later is not an efficient habit. The necessary information will have to be supplied when you write, so you might as well supply it in the planning stage.

### **Indefinite**

I. The Wars of the Roses

A. When they began

B. Why?

### **Definite**

I. The Wars of the Roses

A. Started 1455

B. Caused by rivalry between  
Houses of York and Lancaster

### **Dividing the Material**

Generally, if a heading is to be divided at all, it must be divided into more than one part. If there is an "A," there must be a "B." When there is only one heading under a topic, it usually repeats what is in the topic and should therefore be included with it.

### **Unnecessary division**

The Smithsonian Institution

I. Established by an Englishman

A. James Smithson

1. in 1846

II. Divided into rooms by topic

### **Accurate division**

The Smithsonian Institution

I. Established by James Smithson, an  
Englishman, in 1846

II. Divided into rooms by topic

### **Parallel Structure**

The heading of an outline should represent equally important divisions of the subject as a whole, and should be parallel in grammatical form and tense. In a topic outline, if 'I' is a noun, 'II' and 'III' are also nouns; if 'I' is a prepositional phrase, so are 'II' and 'III'. The same principle applies to subdivisions.

### **Unparallel headings**

Growing roses

I. Preparing the soil

II. Planting

III. Growing the plant

IV. Mildew

V. Insect pests

VI. Using a spray gun

### **Parallel headings**

Growing roses

I. Preparing the soil

II. Planting

III. Watering

IV. Fertilizing

V. Spraying

The subdivisions should also designate equally important and parallel divisions of one phase of the main divisions.

### **Unparallel subheads**

I. Job opportunities in Wisconsin

A. Raising crops

B. White-collar work

C. Dairy farms

D. Factory jobs

E. Breweries

### **Parallel subheads**

I. Job opportunities in Wisconsin

A. Agriculture

B. Business

C. Industry

(Adapted from Handbook of Current English 8th Edition, Jim W. Corder and John J. Ruszkiewicz)

## **Sample Topic Outline and Thesis**

### Biomechanics in Our Lives

Thesis: Because of the rapid advances made in biomechanics, this science will someday affect the lives of everyone, athlete and non-athlete alike.

I. Uses of biomechanics in sports training

A. Traditional approach to training

1. Exercises for long jumpers

2. Training for baseball players

- B. Biomechanical discoveries about training
- C. Implications for training
- II. Technology in biomechanics
  - A. Performance and efficiency test
    - 1. Oxygen consumption
    - 2. Weight distribution
    - 3. Running traits
  - B. Photography and light technology
  - C. Computer diagnosis and prediction
    - 1. MacWilkins's improved performance
    - 2. Terry Albritton's improved performance
- III. Medical uses of biomechanics
  - A. Recreation counseling
  - B. Rehabilitative programs
    - 1. Surgery
    - 2. Medical products
- IV. Business and industrial uses of biomechanics
  - A. Sports equipment
  - B. Sports clothing
  - C. Industrial robots