

### How to Write a Formal Outline



It is my ambition to say in ten sentences what others say in a whole book.

### What is an Outline?

An outline is a formal system used to think about and organize an essay. It helps you to provide focus and organization in your writing. Outlines provide an overall picture of how your essay will read.

### The Formal Sentence Outline

The sentence outline is done in full sentences and follows a rigid format, using Roman and Arabic numerals along with capital and small letters of the alphabet. This helps both you and anyone who reads your outline to identify the main ideas of your essay and follow the flow of these ideas.

For the first essay in this class, you will be required to write a sentence outline.

In the future, when you wish to conference with me about an essay, it is *highly suggested* that you come to our meeting with a rough draft of a sentence outline so that we can be most productive in our time together.

Also as important, you will be required to write a formal sentence outline for your research paper.

Formal sentence outlines are not as scary as they look. Although, to be honest, they can be a bit annoying when all you want to do is get an assignment over and done with. However, they are the first critical step in training yourself to properly organizing your thoughts and writing a coherent and concise essay.

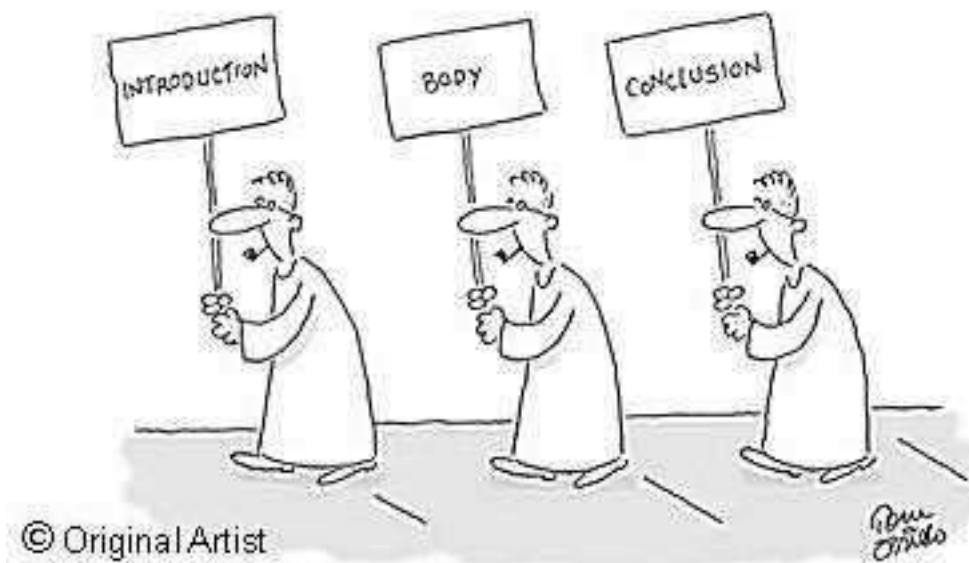
It also may appear that writing a sentence outline is almost like writing your actual essay. The reason for this is that for each body paragraph you are required to write all of the following:

- a complete topic sentence that connects directly to your thesis
- 2 subtopic sentences that each address a specific idea that supports your topic sentence
- listed supported facts that will/may be used in proving the subtopic sentence.
- Identified, summarized and analyzed document use that will be used in proving the subtopic sentence.

All of these must be included in a final formal paragraph. The idea is to make sure all of these actually are included, and that they make sense in the order in which you place them.

Therefore, your sentence outline acts as the rough draft of your final essay.

So what does a formal sentence outline look like?



**SAMPLE OUTLINE for the question**  
**“To what extent was the world a global community c1750?”**

- I. **THESIS STATEMENT:** Even though European colonization played a critical role in making the four corners of the global more interconnected through cultural and commercial interactions, the world cannot be considered a global community in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century because wars of conquest, slavery and Eurocentrism resulted in the exploitation of peoples, as well as the theft of their land and resources.
- II. **TOPIC SENTENCE:** Europeans claimed wars of conquest were justified because they believed they were culturally, religiously and racially superior to the people they subjugated.
  - a. Europeans believed they and their civilization were naturally superior
    1. list specific evidence from homework readings and class notes
    2. In **de Sepúlveda’s *On the Reasons for the Just War among the Indians*** he argues that...
    3. In **King Ferdinand and Isabella’s royal decree of 1501** they state that...
  - b. Europeans believed they had an obligation to save people by converting them to Christianity
    1. list specific evidence from homework readings and class notes
    2. In **Cortez’s account of the Aztec during his exploration and conquest of Central America** his actions demonstrate...
    3. In the **Papal Decree of 1537** the Roman Catholic pope claims that...
- III. **TOPIC SENTENCE:** In their desire to expand their own trade, open new markets and surpass rival nations, Europeans seized resources and land to bolster their own economies.
  - a. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, European conquerors, specifically the Spanish, forced indigenous peoples to work in gold and silver mines for their own immediate profit.
    1. list specific evidence from homework readings and class notes
    - 2....
  - b. Over the course of the next two centuries, Europeans set up large plantations and colonies in order to expand trade routes and regulate valuable new goods.
    1. list specific evidence from homework readings and class notes
    - 2....
- IV. **TOPIC SENTENCE:** The Spanish plantation system and the transatlantic “triangle trade” were rooted in denying human beings their freedom, land, and culture.
  - a. The encomienda system in the colonies of New Spain and Peru relied upon forced labor and exploitation.
    1. list specific evidence from homework readings and class notes
    - 2....
  - b. The transatlantic trade system was dependent upon African slaves, both as a commodity and as a source of labor to produce valuable cash crops.
    1. list specific evidence from homework readings and class notes
    - 2....
- V. **CONCLUSION:**  
[Insert complete paragraph here]

## CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF AN OUTLINE:

### 1. The thesis statement:

*The thesis answers the question in one direct sentence and provides clear focus for the essay. It is the most critical part of the essay. Think of it as road map for your essay. Without this map, the reader will have to find his or her way through your essay without a clear direction. Without it, your writing and the reader will get lost along the way.*

*Your thesis statement MUST BE:*

- a complete, coherent, grammatically correct sentence*
- answer the question directly*

EXAMPLE: To What extent was the world a global community in 1750 CE?

Even though European colonization played a critical role in making the four corners of the global more interconnected through cultural and commercial interactions, the world cannot be considered a global community in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century because wars of conquest, slavery and Eurocentrism resulted in the exploitation of peoples, as well as theft of their land and resources.

Does this thesis answer the question? How do you know for sure?

How many board ideas are present in this thesis statement? What are the grammatical techniques used to clearly present these ideas?

What are the specific sub-ideas that must be addressed in the outline of this essay to prove the thesis?

## 2. The topic sentence:

*The topic sentence focuses in on one of the ideas expressed in the thesis and elaborates on it. The paragraph that follows this topic sentence must explain, prove and analyze the idea stated.*

### **EXAMPLES OF 3 TOPIC SENTENCES FOR THE ABOVE THESIS:**

1. Europeans claimed wars of conquest were justified because they believed they were culturally, religiously and racially superior to the people they subjugated.
2. In their desire to expand their own trade, open new markets and surpass rival nations, Europeans seized resources and land to bolster their own economies.
3. The Spanish plantation system and the transatlantic “triangle trade” were rooted in denying human beings their freedom, land, and culture.

Do these topic sentences connect to the thesis? How do you know for sure?

Individually, do each of these topic sentences provide a clear direction for two subtopic sentences? How do you know for sure?

Refer back to your analysis of the thesis statement. Are all aspects of the thesis statement identified and expanded upon with these three topic sentence? Explain.

### 3. Subtopic Sentences

*Each topic sentence should be supported by 2 subtopic sentences that expand upon it. When writing an essay using assigned documents or research, it is critical to have both factual historical evidence and document evidence that support this idea. Always remember that when you make a generalization or state an idea, you must always have evidence to support them.*

V. **TOPIC SENTENCE:** Europeans claimed wars of conquest were justified because they believed they were culturally, religiously and racially superior to the people they subjugated.

- a. Europeans believed they and their civilization were naturally superior.
  - 1. list specific evidence from homework readings and class notes
  - 2. In **de Sepúlveda's *On the Reasons for the Just War among the Indians*** he argues that...
  - 3. In **King Ferdinand and Isabella's royal decree of 1501** they state that...
- b. Europeans believed they had an obligation to save people by converting them to Christianity.
  - 1. list specific evidence from homework readings and class notes
  - 2. In **Cortez's account of the Aztec during his exploration and conquest of Central America** his actions demonstrate...
  - 3. In the **Papal Decree of 1537** the Roman Catholic pope claims that...

What are the specific ideas that are stated in the topic sentence that must be expanded upon in the paragraph?

In subtopic "a", which of these specific ideas are addressed? What about in subtopic "b"?

Notice the bulleted list under each subtopic sentence. What purpose do these lists serve?

What is meant by the word "evidence"?

Notice how the documents are identified in these lists. Why do you think the documents are introduced in this manner?

## **FAQs**

### **How long does the essay have to be?**

As a general rule, essays should include an introduction, 3 body paragraphs, and a conclusion. If you were to think in terms of pages, this means 3-4 pages.

### **How long should a paragraph be?**

A proper paragraph has between 6-14 sentences.

If your paragraph has a proper topic sentence and 2 subtopic sentences, the rest of your paragraph should be a combination of evidence and analysis.

### **Do I need to include a full introduction in a formal sentence outline?**

For an outline, no. The thesis is all that matters.

HOWEVER, for the actual essay, a full introduction is required.

An introduction provides significant broad background information that is necessary to “set the stage” for your thesis statement.

In social studies, the thesis statement goes at the end of the introduction.

On average, an introduction should be 4-6 sentences, depending on how long your actual essay is.

### **Do I need to include a full conclusion in a formal sentence outline?**

Yes. In social studies, conclusions should not introduce new facts and ideas.

A conclusion is simply a restating of the key ideas/arguments made in the essay.

Refer back to your thesis, topic sentences, and subtopic sentences when writing a conclusion.

On average, a conclusion should be 5-7 sentences long.

### **Does grammar and spelling count?**

Yes and no. Where I catch it, I will make suggestions to improve the clarity of your writing.

As a general rule, if I cannot clearly understand what you are trying to say because of poor grammar or word usage, it will impact your grade on the essay as a whole.

### **What are the print-out regulations?**

At the top of the page:

Your name,

WH + your section

assignment name

date

Times New Roman

font size 12

double spaced lines

1 inch margins—no more, no less.