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Outlining Strategies for Common Academic Scenarios

At the graduate level, outlining is a prewriting process that generates, organizes, and refines your thoughts and sources towards meeting the disciplinary demands of a final product (e.g., an end-of-semester paper, research paper, conference presentation, dissertation proposal, etc.). They can serve a range of purposes in the writing process and be used as a brainstorming tool, a means to test out different flows of ideas or arguments, or a highly detailed plan, amongst other ways. In addition to a range of purposes, they should also be adapted to the scope and type of final product as well as the audience (if anyone other than oneself). So, as a general rule, an outline should be adapted to the writer's purpose, context, and end product.

This handout will work to provide a few templates for adapting outlines to typical graduate contexts. The first is utilizing the CARS model for an introduction and the AXES model for paragraph or section structure. The second is using the structure prescribed in APA's Journal Article Reporting Standards to create an outline for APA style research papers. Both of these examples can be adapted for similar but slightly different situations.

General Outline Structure
⟹ Use Roman Numerals, decimals, upper- and lower-case letters, or another structure to build various levels of indented sections based on major and minor points, evidence, citations, and other information.
⟹ There are numerous indented structures available online and through Microsoft Word for free. Find one you like, so you don't have to spend a lot of time formatting!
⟹ To see examples using various general structure, visit here (1), (2), (3).

Examples:
1. Main Point 1
    1.1. Supporting Idea 1
        1.1.1. Details/Examples/Quotes/Analysis
    1.2. Supporting Idea 2
        1.2.1. Details/Examples/Quotes/Analysis
            1.2.1.1 More about Detail/Example/Quote/Analysis 1.2.1

I. Main Point 2
    A. Supporting Idea 1
        1. Details/Examples/Quotes/Analysis
    B. Supporting Idea 2
        2. Details/Examples/Quotes/Analysis
            a. More about Detail/Example/Analysis 2 above

CARS & AXES Outline

<u>CARS</u>
⟹ Use the [Creating A Research Space (CARS) model](#) to structure the introduction of the outline. This model is designed to provide background on the topic by establishing its significance theoretically or practically before then briefly citing some key findings that support its significance. Then, a niche or gap in existing literature is presented before how the writer's work will fill that niche/gap. For examples of introductions that use the CARS model, download [these](#) [articles](#).

I. Introduction

    A. Establish Territory: What is the situation?
        1. <u>Claim Centrality</u>: demonstrate the centrality of the topic by discussing previous research or its impact on the world. **Finish only one sentence below but feel free to alter it as needed to fit your situation.**
            a. X has been studied extensively…
            b. There has been a growing interest in…
            c. Recent studies have focused on…
            d. X remains a serious problem…
        2. <u>Review items of previous research</u>: what has been researched and by whom? **Finish a few sentences that highlight *representative* findings from literature.**
            a. X (2018) found that…
            b. Several researchers have suggested that… (X, 2011, Y, 2020)

    B. Establish a Niche/Gap: What is the problem?
        1. How are previous research or approaches not complete or why are extensions needed via new perspectives? **Finish only one sentence below but feel free to alter it as needed to fit your situation.**
            a. However, the research has so far failed to consider…
            b. While there has been a lot of research on X, there has been considerably less on…
            c. In light of recent developments, a question arises about…
            d. Given the research so far, we should further investigate…

    C. Occupy the Niche/Gap: Present your thesis
        1. A purposive thesis that presents key ideas. **Finish only one sentence below but feel free to alter it as needed to fit your situation.**
            a. In this paper, I compare X to Y to demonstrate…
            b. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate…
        2. A descriptive thesis that describes key ideas.
            a. This paper reports on the results of…
            b. In this paper, I argue that…

AXES
⇒ The [Assertion/eXample/Explanation/Significance (AXES) model](#) was designed to offer a structure for coherent paragraphs but can also be applied to sections. It begins with the main claim for the paragraph/subsection (*assertion*). Then, a piece of evidence is provided for the claim (*example*) along with an (*explanation*) as to how that evidence supports the claim. Then, the section is wrapped into the overall large section or paper with an explicit statement how (*significance*). Usually, a comprehensive and strong support and explanation of a claim does not fit into four sentences, so various combinations of this model work for various situations (AXXES, AXEXES, AXEES).

II. Larger Section Title 1
    A. Subsection 1
        1. Assertion (claim of the paragraph/subsection)
            a.
        2. eXample 1 (quote, data, or other evidence that supports your assertion)
            a.
        3. Explanation 1 (shows *how* the example supports the assertion)
            a.
            b.
        4. eXample 2
            a.
        5. Explanation 2
            a.
        6. Significance (reveals how or why the paragraph/subsection supports the paper's or larger section's overall thesis)
            a.

APA Research Paper Outline
⇒ Scientific reports and journal articles from across the range of sciences usually use some version of the IMRaD paper structure (introduction, methods, results, and discussion). The APA 7th Edition provides detailed guidance on what should go into each section depending on the methodology of the research ([quantitative](#), [qualitative](#), or [mixed method](#)). An outline can be developed across a range of detail using this [JARS guidance](#). The template below provides a general structure.

I. Introduction
    A. Purpose of the investigation and issues being reported
        1.
    B. Review of relevant background literature
        1.
    C. Study objectives and/or hypotheses

II. Method

    A. Full description of each step of the study

        1. Materials used

            a.

            b.

        2. Procedures followed

            a.

            b.

        3. Research design

            a.

            b.

        4. Flow of participants

            a.

        5.

III. Results (usually only one; both if mixed method)

    A. Report of the results of the statistical analyses conducted (quantitative)

        1.

        2.

        3.

    B. Report of the findings using natural language (qualitative)

        1.

        2.

        3.

IV. Discussion

    A. Summary of the study, including any interpretation, limitations, and implications of the results or findings or next steps

        1. Interpretation

            a.

            b.

            c.

        2. Limitations

            a.

        3. Implications of results

            a.

            b.

            c.

        4. Next steps

            a.