Outlining the Research Paper

**Working / Preliminary Outline** After you have chosen your topic and clarified your purpose, you are ready to write your working outline. This simple preliminary outline guides your work. The main or general headings you use will be important in organizing your information. These divisions may change as you progress in your research, but they will provide you with a way to take notes in an organized way.

**Examples of Working Outlines**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Effect of Destroying Wetlands</th>
<th>The Drawbacks of Artificial Turf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. Definition of wetlands</strong></td>
<td>I. History of use of artificial turf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Causes of destruction of wetlands</td>
<td>II. Statistics on use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Effects of destruction</td>
<td>III. Reasons for use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. On plant life</td>
<td>IV. Drawbacks for use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. On animal life</td>
<td>A. Injury information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. On humans</td>
<td>B. Expert opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Value of wetlands to humans</td>
<td>C. Expenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V. Alternatives to artificial turf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Final Formal Outline** When you have concluded all research, you need to shape the information into a unified, coherent whole. This requires the preparation of a typed, formal, detailed outline of the paper.

- As you organize your notes, you will begin to see connections between items; the slugs your note cards and the matching headings on your preliminary outline will help you to sort the cards into matching groups. “Shuffle” all of your sources together according to the slugs, rearranging cards so that ideas logically flow together.
- Often you may find duplicate information from different sources. Choose to keep that which is best-stated or most recent research.
- Then order the subjects under each main heading into more detailed subheadings.
- Finally plan an effective introduction and conclusion that fit the plan. Generally, avoid the use of the actual terms introduction and conclusion and find other more specific ways to word the opening and closing parts of the outline.
- The outline you will design is a topic outline and written in fragments. Some courses require sentence outlines. You may use complete questions or statements; however, be consistent.
- **Capitalize** the first word of every entry. **Punctuate** with period after each Roman numeral, Arabic number, or letter not in parentheses. Since this is a topic outline, do not add period at end of entry.
- **Parallelism** is required. Use the same kind of phrasing or grammatical structure for all topics within a level must be worded similarly.
  - For example, if the first word in a list of topics is a noun, the others following in that list must be nouns;
  - if you use an “ing”- ending gerund phrase, continue to use that form;
  - if a major heading is a question, all similar headings should be questions.
- **Type** double-spaced, according to traditional indenting pattern. See sample following:
Wetlands: Of What Value?

Thesis: When earth’s citizens recognize wetlands’ values, perhaps they will be more concerned about the protection of those vanishing areas.

I. Definitions of wetlands
   A. Definition by category
   B. Definition by characteristics
   C. Definition by law

II. Destruction of wetlands
   A. Losses
      1. Past
      2. Continuing
   B. Causes

III. Effects of destruction
   A. On plant life
   B. On animal life
      1. Marine creatures
      2. Waterfowl
      3. Other wildlife
   C. On water
      1. Storage area
      2. Filtering system
      3. Storm protection
   D. On biosphere

IV. Value to humans
   A. Economic impact
   B. Economic controversy
   C. Resulting efforts