Outlining

What is an outline?
• the first step to writing a paper
• a plan for the paper
• a tool for arranging ideas in the order they will be presented
• an overview of what the paper is going to be about

How does an outline help in writing a paper?
Outlines help the writer with their topic and organization plus help save time writing the paper itself. When outlining writers can:
• think through their topic to see if there is enough information for the paper
• determine what needs to be researched
• organize thoughts into paragraphs
• organize the paragraphs and move them around for clarity
• figure out what information needs to be added to the introduction and conclusion
• come up with good transitions

Creating the Outline

Step One: Brainstorm
The first step to organizing an outline is to figure out what you already know about the topic. *Brainstorming* is a good way to get all of the ideas out of your head and onto paper in some way.

*Brainstorming* can be accomplished in any way that is comfortable for you, and many writers employ more than one brainstorming strategy. Common brainstorming strategies include webbing, listing, freewriting, and questioning.

Reasons I like the Beach:
fun, theme parks, ocean air, sun, pretty views, seafood, swimming, salt water taffy, frozen lemonade

Step Two: Categorize
Group similar ideas together in the same paragraph. Categorizing will make the essay flow better.
Step Three: Label and Organize
Create **main headings** and **subheadings** to add organization to the outline.

**Main headings** (categories)
are the main points within the paper.

**Subheadings** (subcategories)
are supporting details and examples for the main ideas.

Always be flexible. The initial plan for the paper can change.

Step Four: Develop the Outline
Expand the outline to better prepare yourself for writing the paper. Formal outlines require:
- full sentences – thesis and topic sentences
- paragraph details – include support and research, as needed
- thought about what exact information will be in the final paper
- ideas about the introduction and conclusion

Outline Examples

**Thesis:** One sentence that introduces the topic and main ideas in the writing.

I. Topic Sentence: A sentence at the beginning of the paragraph stating what will be discussed.
   A. Support #1
      1. Detail
         a. Example
         b. Example
      2. Detail
         a. Support #2
         b. Support #3

**Thesis:** My favorite place on earth is Myrtle Beach because of the relaxing atmosphere, fun things to do, and wonderful food to eat.

I. Myrtle Beach is the place I can go to unwind and enjoy the great outdoors.
   A. Calming atmosphere
      1. perfect temperatures with the sun beating down
         a. ocean breezes
         b. salt in the air
      2. birds flying by and sound of the seagulls calling to one another

After you have completed the formal outline, it does not take much more to create the full essay. Add in an introduction, transition sentences, a conclusion, and citations (if needed), and the essay is complete.