

How to build an outline

An outline is like scaffolding; it helps support the structure and organization of your paper as you write. In addition, developing an outline after you conduct your research and before you start writing your paper helps you to see potential gaps in your research and assists you in creating effective paragraph transitions.

The outline is a flexible tool that you can adapt to suit your own purposes. You may feel happy enough with a skeleton outline that just shows the main idea for each of your paragraphs; alternatively, you may want to construct a comprehensive outline that shows full topic sentences, supporting arguments, and points of evidence for each supporting argument.

Example:

Thesis: Despite Hamlet's highly developed moral nature, he becomes morally compromised while delaying his revenge.

- I. Introduction: Hamlet's father asks Hamlet not only to seek vengeance but also to keep his mind untainted.**
- II. Hamlet has a highly developed moral nature:**
 - Supporting argument A: Hamlet is idealistic.
 - Supporting argument B: Hamlet is aware of his own faults, whereas others are self-satisfied.
 - Supporting argument C: Hamlet does not want to take revenge without grounds for acting.
- III. Hamlet becomes morally compromised while delaying:**
 - Supporting argument A: The turning point in Hamlet's moral decline is his killing of Polonius.
 - Supporting argument B: Hamlet's moral decline continues when he sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their death.
 - Supporting argument C: Hamlet already began his moral decline before the turning point in the play, the killing of Polonius.
 - o Evidence 1: Hamlet treats women badly.
 - o Evidence 2: Hamlet criticizes others in the play for acting falsely to get ahead, but in adopting the disguise of madness he, too, is presenting a false face to the world.
- IV. Though Hamlet becomes more compromised the longer he delays, killing the king would have been a morally questionable act.**
- V. Conclusion: The play Hamlet questions the adequacy of a system of ethics based on honour and revenge.**

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