

Developing a Research Outline

The UNA University Writing Center
Writing & Research Process
Workshop Series

Dr. Robert T. Koch Jr.

Director, University Writing Center

University of North Alabama

28 October, 2008

Goals

- Understand the basics of an outline
- Understand strategies for organizing an argument
- Understand how to build academic paragraphs that support argument

Outline Purpose and Characteristics

- Lays out the structure of your argument, including the complete thesis.
- Can be simple or detailed (the more detailed, the better).
- Uses a number and/or letter system.
- Uses indentation.
- Is never immutable! (Research involves change!)

Organizing an Argument

- Rhetorical Triangle (Logos, Ethos, Pathos)
- Common Ground / Background / Definition
- Patterns of Organization – What is needed?
 - Problem & Solution
 - Classification & Division
 - Cause & Effect
 - Compare & Contrast
 - Illustration
 - Process

General Structure in Academic Research

1. Introduction – What is the problem and significance?
2. Review of Literature –What has happened so far?
3. Methodology – How did you conduct your study?
4. Findings – What did you discover?
5. Discussion – What does this discovery mean?
6. Conclusion – What should be done next?
7. References

Paragraph Parts

- Claim (Topic or Summarizing Sentence)
 - Your assertion -- it ties to the overall argument and thesis
- Evidence
 - Secondary sources – Introduction, Review of Literature, Methodology, Discussion, Conclusion
 - Primary Sources -- Findings
- Discussion
 - Builds the connection among Evidence , Claim, and Thesis

Outline Strategy - Introduction

Use the required components of the general structure as your starting outline.

1. Introduction

1. Establish the Problem
2. Establish significance
 1. Why is it a problem
 2. Who is it a problem for?
3. Thesis

Outline Strategy – Review of Literature

1. Review of Literature

1. The terms of the discussion
 1. How are terms defined? Who has defined them this way?
2. Common ground
 1. What are the agreed upon problems?
 2. What findings tend to agree upon solutions?
3. Divergent findings
 1. What differences have been uncovered?
 2. What competing solutions have been offered?

Outline Strategy – Methodology

Explain it so the study can be repeated

1. What or who was studied?
2. How were they studied?
3. What instruments were used?
4. What time frame?
5. How was data analyzed?
6. What are the limitations?

Outline Strategy – Findings

Statements of factual discovery – No opinions or interpretations

1. What did the data show?
 1. Tables
 2. Graphs
 3. Maps,
 4. Charts
2. Don't repeat what's easily shown in the table. Say it once concisely.

Outline Strategy – Discussion & Conclusion

1. What do the findings mean?
2. What are Solutions to the problem?
3. If solutions compete, which is best and why?

Conclusion

1. What course of action is required?
2. What are the limitations of the study?