

Guidelines for successful Research Paper Outline

1. What is an outline and why do we need it?

Outline is an organized plan for your paper. We make outlines to see whether our ideas connect to one another, which order of ideas works best and also to see the overall picture we are trying to tell in our paper.

2. What does an outline for a research paper look like?

Outline plans all the components of the research paper:

- a) *Introduction* – here the researcher states his/her topic or research question and follows up with discussion on how it fits into existing literature on that particular topic
- b) *Research Design and Methods* – here the researcher states the exact methodology that will be employed in his/her research: how and where data will be collected, from whom, in what manner;
- c) *Findings* – also called *Results* section, where researcher identifies his/hers major findings (what was found, any surprising findings, any findings that support or dispute the research question) and organizes them around the original research question
- d) *Discussion* – here researcher compares/contrasts their research findings with literature findings on the topic and recommends issues for further research

3. Do I really need an outline? Isn't that just extra work?

An outline is a tool that will assist you in organizing and writing your research paper.

Keep the following things in mind when you are writing and using your outline:

- An outline is a tool that organizes your material. It shapes your information into a pattern you can understand and follow as you write your paper
- You can choose the amount of material you want to include in your outline. Of course, the more detailed the outline will be, the easier it is to write the first draft of your paper. Choose the amount of detail that best suits your own writing style
- Keep in mind that an outline is just a preliminary plan and since writing is a creative process, your outline and paper might change and improve as you gain more knowledge on your research topic

Example of a Research Paper Outline

Theme: Shopping differences between genders

Introduction

- Broad topic: “Does shopping have different affects on different genders?”
- How does shopping affect our society? Authors A, B, C argue that...
- Thesis: “Shopping affects genders in a very extensive way through society.”

Research Design and Methods

- Explanation why this question was selected
- Explanation what knowledge the researcher hopes to gain through this research paper
- Explanation of research methodology: what kind of interviews, with whom, how research will be done

Results

- Write out general findings: what data supported/rejected the thesis (data can be presented in a table and explained in the text)
- What results were expected and what was not

Discussion

- Compare and contrast research findings with literature review on the topic
- Recommendation for further research