

## WVWC Writing Center Tip of the Week



**Problem:** I have a long essay due next week!  
Where do I start?

**Solution:** Make an outline!

### ➤ Pre-Writing With Outlines

During pre-writing, you can make a working outline—an outline that guides you in your drafting. It helps you answer the question: how am I going to present my information, given my assignment, my audience, and my thesis?

### ➤ What does an outline do?

- It supports the thesis.
- It establishes the order and relationship of the main points.
- It clarifies the relationship between the major and minor points.

### ➤ Formal and informal outlines

An outline is a kind of *graphic scheme* of the organization of your paper. It indicates the main arguments for your thesis as well as the subtopics under each main point. Outlines range from an informal use of indenting and graphics (such as --, \*, +) to a formal use of Roman numerals and letters.

- For shorter, less complex papers, a few informal notes jotted down may be enough. But longer papers are too big to organize mentally; you generally need a more systematic plan to organize the various parts of the paper
- Your job as the writer is to think through the *relationship* between your ideas. For example, is one idea similar to or different from another? Is one a cause of another? An effect? An example? Is one idea the solution to another?
- Do your ideas fall into one of the conventional approaches to thinking about an issue: cause-effect, problem-solution, argument, comparison-contrast, definition, classification? You can use these standard strategies to help you think through your ideas and come up with a logical plan for your writing. That plan then becomes your outline.
- Good outlines often bring about better results. Outlining your ideas will save time!

The Writing Center is great place to get started!