



## Research paper assignment II: Turning a thesis into an outline

Once you have **refined your thesis** for clarity and strength you are ready to create an outline for your research paper. A good outline gives your paper structure, organizes your argument, and keeps your sources from dominating your own argument.

**Research papers should have four parts:** (1) an introduction; (2) a body; (3) a conclusion; and (4) a list of references. And your outline should reflect this structure.

The **introduction** gives the reader an introduction to the topic of your paper, defines terms as needed and sets the stage for your thesis. It begins with fairly general information and ends with a very specific argument, your **thesis**. Be sure that your introduction clearly introduces the problem your thesis addresses and that it has sufficient depth.

The **body** of the paper is your opportunity to defend your thesis using facts and examples. It's also where you state the arguments of those who would oppose your thesis (or take the other side of the argument) and explain why you find that argument or position weaker than your thesis. Each section of the body of your research paper should begin with an introductory sentence, the **topic sentence**. The bulk of each section details the arguments it makes and cites evidence in the form of facts and **sources**. Remember to cite sources using APA or MLA formats. And each section should end with its own **concluding sentence**. Ideally the concluding sentence of one section also serves as a **transition sentence** that **connects** that section to the next.

The **conclusion** of your paper gives you an opportunity to **restate your thesis** and **summarize your defense**. It's the summing up and should be strong and assertive.

So, what does this mean for your outline? Start simple:

- A. Introduction
- B. Body
- C. Conclusion

Then, placing your thesis at the top (A) and then get to work on the body (B). For each argument you can make, or each chunk of supporting evidence creating a section of the body. You should be able to knock three or four out pretty quickly. Once you think you've listed all of the support for your thesis, add at least one section that summarizes the counter argument made by those who oppose your thesis. This section needs to present the counter argument, evidence for it, and reasons that you disagree with it.





At this point, sit back and **evaluate** what you've got so far. A strange thing can happen at this point in the process. You may find that your arguments and evidence (each section of the body except for the last) do indeed support your thesis. If so, great! But sometimes the body that you've outlined seem to support a thesis that isn't the one you've written. What to do? The simplest solution is to change your thesis to the one that your research supports. Or you can head back and do more research to build a better, more supportive, body for your paper. Once in a great while, the body may support the opponents of the thesis rather than supporting the thesis. Consider changing your thesis!

What next? Add **sources** for each of the facts or arguments in each section of your body. It's easier to do this in the outline than to find sources once you've drafted the paper. Finally, add the outline of your **conclusion**.

Here's an outline from Hartness Library that you can adapt for your paper<sup>2</sup>.

**A. Thesis statement & introduction**

1. Introduction
2. Thesis

**B. Body – Idea 1**

1. Background
2. Supporting information
3. Facts & statistics
4. Conclusion

**C. Body – Idea 2**

1. Background
2. Supporting information
3. Facts & statistics
4. Conclusion

**D. Body – Idea 3**

1. Background
2. Supporting information
3. Facts & statistics
4. Conclusion

**E. Counter argument**

1. Description of opposing views
2. Supporting Information from opposing views
3. Analysis & conclusion about counter argument

**F. Summary & conclusion**

1. Summary of main arguments & counter arguments
2. Summary of evidence
3. Conclusion

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<sup>2</sup> <https://hartness.vsc.edu/help/research-basics/outlining/>