

CREATING USEFUL OUTLINES



College of the
Siskiyous
WRITING LAB

INTRODUCTION: There are many reasons to create outlines. Outlines are useful to help organize your thoughts and show hierarchical relationships or logical ordering of information, especially early in the writing process. Such rough outlines have advantages: they can be produced quickly and revised easily. Later a more formal outline may be needed when the subject is more complex.

How do I create an outline?

- Determine the purpose of your paper.
- Determine the audience you are writing for.
- Develop the thesis of your paper.

Then:

- **Brainstorm:** List all the ideas you want to include in your paper.
- **Organize:** Group related ideas together.
- **Order:** Arrange materials in hierarchical sections from general to specific.
- **Label:** Create main headings and subheadings.

MLA Sample Outline

Thesis: El Niño can be very destructive and have lasting effects.

I. Disastrous Weather Effects

- A. December Ice Storm in Maine
 - 1. Huge power outage
 - 2. Schools out 2 weeks
 - 3. Jobs lost
 - 4. Cost in trees
 - 5. Replacing power poles, etc.
- B. Rains in California
 - 1. Mudslides
 - 2. Highways ripped apart
 - 3. Expensive homes in ocean
 - 4. Insurance costs
- C. Weather in Florida
 - 1. Killer tornadoes
 - 2. Freeze in March
 - a. Dead oranges
 - b. Costs of other fruits
- D. Other Disasters
 - 1. Flash floods in Arizona
 - 2. Droughts in the Mid-West

II. Not So Bad Effects

- A. Mild Winter in New England
- B. Flowers in Death Valley Desert
- C. Skiing Conditions in Colorado
- D. Mild Winter in Upper Plains

III. Long-Term Effects

- A. Power Lines Go Underground
- B. Landscape
 - 1. Trees
 - 2. Eroded River Channels

IV. Really Important Effects

- A. Sense of Powerlessness
- B. Fear of Next Winter