Creating Effective Outlines

Many of us think that outlines are cumbersome and just extra work to do. But they are highly important tools to organizing your essay, not to mention reducing your writing workload. Before you write, you should always have an outline. Outlines help you think through what you want to write and why. Your outline can serve as a backbone to your ideas while you are writing. A good outline allows you to establish your purpose for writing, organize your main points/arguments, briefly describe details and examples of your main points and refine your final thesis statement

Before the outline

- Define your purpose. Be sure of your assignment requirements, your target audience and the type of assignment or writing. Defining your purpose helps you appreciate your goal(s) and consolidate your understanding of the purpose of writing.
- Formulate a working thesis. A working thesis is a brief and rough statement identifying your topic, purpose of writing, and your position on the topic. Constantly refer back to your working thesis while creating your outline. Note: your working thesis CAN CHANGE as you create your outline. Your working thesis often becomes more refined and clearer as you organize your ideas in the outline.

Creating an outline

An outline doesn't have to be pretty in the beginning. It is a platform to get your ideas down on paper. So leave yourself room for errors. You can arrange your ideas in the outline until you are satisfied. First, list your major points. For each of your major points, list relevant examples or details. Examine the details and your major points. Remember: When you list your points, make a quick note of how your points relate to your working thesis. Revise your working thesis if needed.

Using outlines

The most important component to successful outlines is to USE THEM as you write your drafts. Here are some guidelines for using outlines effectively:

- Keep your outline handy as you write
- Stick with the organization of your outline first when writing your first draft. If you decide on changing the organization of your paper, make a note of the changes in your outline as well.
- Revisit your outline after you have completed your final draft; compare the structure/content of your paper and the structure/ content of your outline. Justify those differences and see if they make sense to you.

Formal outline

A formal outline helps organize your paper in detail. Sometimes, a first draft can emerge out of modifying the points in your formal outline. Leave sufficient time to make a formal outline so that you can constantly refer to the outline. It will relieve the stress of organizing and articulating your arguments when you write.

Format of a formal outline:

Thesis

1.   Subtopic
    A.   Supporting point/ topic I
        i.   Details/ example or illustration
    B.   Supporting point/ topic II
2.   Subtopic
    A.   Supporting point/ topic I
        i.   Analysis/ Argument
            a.   Details/example
        ii.   Counterarguments..... etc

Formal outline:

Thesis: Schools should provide moral education classes as teachers have moral responsibility for students.

Intro: Define moral values/morality. Provide context information

1.   Students require strong moral values to thrive in school
    A.   Moral values are important for critical thinking
        i.   Example/ Illustration
    B.   Moral values allow students to be aware of current affairs
        i.   Example/ Illustration
2.   Good sense of morals= safe environment in school
    A.   Respectful relationships with peers and teachers
        i.   Example/illustration
    B.   Nonviolent ways of resolving differences
        i.   Example/illustration
3.   Moral education in school complements parent's moral education at home
    A.   Better relationships between parents/ teachers/ students
        i.   Allows students /teachers /parents better communication
            a.   Example/illustration

Conclusion: Further investigation of other factors. Factors not addressed within the paper.

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