

# Organizing Information IV: Outlining

Students sometimes feel overwhelmed by the large amount of new information presented in their classrooms and textbooks.

- The first step in handling a large amount of information is to reduce the material to its most important parts, by deciding what is important, less important, and unimportant.
- The second step is to organize the important information so that it is easy to study.
  - For help with the first step, see Organizing Information I – III.
  - For help with the second step, see Organizing Information IV – VI.

## What is Outlining?

Outlining is a way to organize information and to show how different ideas relate to each other. Outlining also helps to improve recall and comprehension of related ideas, and to gather and organize information from more than one source into a coherent whole.

### Steps for writing an effective outline:

1. Take notes while you are reading.
2. Notice the organizational patterns the author uses – these may be useful in organizing your outline.
3. Rephrase the most important ideas in the shortest possible form.
4. Organize your outline as a list of main ideas and supporting details.
5. Use key words and short phrases to summarize ideas in your own words. Do not copy from the text or write in complete sentences.
6. Use a system of indentation to graphically illustrate the relationships between main ideas and supporting details. Most outline formats are similar to the one below:

- I. Topic
  - A. Main Idea
    - 1. Subtopic
      - a) Supporting Detail
      - b) Supporting Detail
  - B. Main Idea
    - 1. Subtopic
      - a) Supporting Detail
    - 2. Subtopic
      - a) Supporting Detail
- II. Topic
  - A. And so on...

There are many different ways to number an outline. Make sure you use the style your instructor prefers, or experiment to find a way that works best for your own use.

Adapted from McWhorter, Kathleen T. *Reading Across the Disciplines*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005.