1. Four Main Components for Effective Outlines

Ideally, you should follow these 4 suggestions to create an effective outline. The examples are taken from the Sample Outline handout.

Parallelism - How do I accomplish this?

Each heading and subheading should preserve parallel structure. If the first heading is a noun, the second heading should be a noun. Example:

1. Choose Desired Colleges
   2. Prepare Application

("Choose" and "Prepare" are both verbs.)

Coordination - How do I accomplish this?

All the information contained in Heading 1 should have the same significance as the information contained in Heading 2. The same goes for the subheadings (which should be less significant than the headings). Example:

1. Visit and evaluate college campuses
   2. Visit and evaluate college websites
      1. Note important statistics
      2. Look for interesting classes

(Campus and websites visits are equally significant, as are statistics and classes found on college websites.)

Subordination - How do I accomplish this?

The information in the headings should be more general, while the information in the subheadings should be more specific. Example:

1. Describe an influential person in your life
   1. Favorite high school teacher
2. Grandparent

(A favorite teacher and grandparent are specific examples of influential people.)

Division - How do I accomplish this?

Each heading should be divided into 2 or more parts. Example:

1. Compile resume
   1. List relevant coursework
   2. List work experience
   3. List volunteer experience

(The heading "Compile resume" is divided into 3 parts.)

2. Why and How to Create a Useful Outline

Why create an outline?

- Aids in the process of writing
- Helps you organize your ideas
- Presents your material in a logical form
- Shows the relationships among ideas in your writing
- Constructs an ordered overview of your writing
- Defines boundaries and groups

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 that you want to include in your paper.
- **Organize**: Group related ideas together.
- **Order**: Arrange material in subsections from general to specific or from abstract to concrete.
- **Label**: Create main and sub headings.

Remember: creating an outline before writing your paper will make organizing your thoughts a lot easier. Whether you follow the suggested guidelines is up to you, but making any kind of outline (even just some jotting down some main ideas) will be beneficial to your writing process.

3. Sample Outline
Here is an example of an outline that a student might create before writing an essay. In order to organize her thoughts and make sure that she has not forgotten any key points that she wants to address, she creates the outline as a framework for her essay.

**What is the assignment?**

Your instructor asks the class to write an expository (explanatory) essay on the typical steps a high school student would follow in order to apply to college.

**What is the purpose of this essay?**

To explain the process for applying to college

**Who is the intended audience for this essay?**

High school students intending to apply to college and their parents

**What is the essay’s thesis statement?**

When applying to college, a student follows a certain process which includes choosing the right schools and preparing the application materials.

The College Application Process

1. Choose Desired Colleges
   1. Visit and evaluate college campuses
   2. Visit and evaluate college websites
      1. look for interesting classes
      2. note important statistics
         1. student/faculty ratio
         2. retention rate

2. Prepare Application
   1. Write Personal Statement
      1. Choose interesting topic
         1. Describe an influential person in your life
            1. favorite high school teacher
            2. grandparent
         2. Include important personal details
            1. volunteer work
            2. participation in varsity sports
      2. Revise personal statement

3. Compile resume
   1. List relevant coursework
   2. List work experience
   3. List volunteer experience
      1. tutor at foreign language summer camp
      2. counselor for suicide prevention hotline