



Graduate Online Writing Studio

Outlining Before Writing

A writing assignment has three stages: planning, writing a draft, and editing the draft. There are many ways to plan. Outlining is a common strategy. Outlining allows you to organize your ideas and ensures you have satisfied assignment requirements. Writing with an outline simplifies the writing process and helps you succeed. You are probably familiar with outlines that use Roman numerals, letters (capital and lowercase), and Arabic numerals to show an order from most general information to most specific information. Note how the following task is organized in outline form:

Preparing to Drive a Car

I. Entering the Car

- A. Insert the key in the door lock and turn it counterclockwise
- B. Open the door
 1. Disengage the latch
 2. Pull door open
 - a. Crouch slightly to clear the roof of the car
 - b. Slide onto the driver's seat
- C. Sit behind the wheel

II. Starting the Car

- A. Place right foot on brake
- B. Insert key in steering wheel lock
- C. Turn the key clockwise to start the engine
 1. Release the key when the engine starts
 2. Place both hands on wheel

When you are planning how to address an academic writing assignment, it is usually best to start by organizing your thoughts:

- What is the task your instructor assigned?
- What parts must be included to satisfy the requirements?
- What is your purpose for writing the document?
- What background information will you need to supply to the reader?
- Are there terms or concepts you will need to explain?
- What peer-reviewed sources will support your claims in the document?

Once you have answered these questions, you can begin creating an outline. The Roman numerals will be followed by headings representing the major assignment requirements. The capital letters will be followed by subheadings representing main themes for those requirements and so on. Once you have completed the basic

outline, you can begin filling in the details like the specific assertions you want to make about your chosen topic and which peer-reviewed sources will support those assertions.