

Tips for Writers • Writing an Outline

This tip sheet has been compiled by the staff of the Speaking, Reading and Writing Center. It highlights major elements of outlining that COM students are likely to use in their assignments and serves as a complement to the “Writing an Outline” workshop. It is **not** intended to be inclusive of all required or recommended elements. Students should consider this to be a basic introduction to outlining and should always defer to an instructor’s specific examples and guidelines. Questions about those requirements should be brought to the instructor.

What is an Outline?

An outline is a general plan of the material that is to be presented in a speech or paper.

- ✓ Outlines show the order of various topics in a speech.
- ✓ Outlines show the importance of each topic and the relationship between them.
- ✓ Outlines are your best friend in a speech class.

An outline is NOT a writing assignment. It should not be read word-for-word when presenting a speech but instead should be used as a guide, similar to how a speaker would use note cards when presenting a speech. Even if the assignment requires a full-sentence outline, it should not be read during a speech. Students should be familiar enough with the topic to use it as a guide, not a script.

The Parts of an Outline Include:

- ✓ Cover Page
 - ❖ Depends on individual instructor and style format (APA, MLA, etc.)
- ✓ Introduction
 - ❖ Establishes a topic and core message
 - ❖ Establishes credibility with the audience
 - ❖ Includes a list of main points
- ✓ Body
 - ❖ Each section of the body revolves around one major point
 - ❖ Each major point includes several supporting points, usually at least two
- ✓ Conclusion
 - ❖ Recaps the main points
 - ❖ Summarizes the core message
 - ❖ Includes a Call to Action with persuasive speeches
 - ❖ Be careful not to include any new points not covered in the body
- ✓ Transitions
 - ❖ Communicates to the audience that you are leaving one main point and moving to another
 - ❖ Should never be more than one sentence
- ✓ References or Works Cited page
 - ❖ Will always be its own, independent page
 - ❖ Should include any outside source referenced in the outline
 - ❖ Could result in plagiarism if missing, incomplete, or incorrect
 - ❖ May vary in format from standard style requirements (check with your instructor)

Come by the Speaking, Reading and Writing Center to practice your speech in our soundproof speaking booths. You can record your speech and work with a speech tutor to get feedback.

And....good luck!

The Speaking, Reading, and Writing Center

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