

About Outlines (5 Paragraph Theme)

An outline is a framework that shows the plan the writer has for his paper. In a 5 paragraph theme, the outline includes an Introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. The outline also presents this information in a Roman numeral list.

In an outline, the thesis statement comes first. In the thesis, the writer combines all of his/her major topics to create a short statement telling what the paper is about. The thesis mentions major topics in the order they will appear in the body of the paper. After the thesis, the writer lists the major topics in the order they were written in the thesis.

Under the major topics are listed any minor points the writer may use to give a little more detail. Because an outline is simply a framework for the paper, it does not need too much detail or too many points and it is always subject to change. A “traditional 5 paragraph theme” outline has three major topics. The writer, however, may choose to have more than three topics, just not so many that it is difficult to write the paper.

Example 1 (No Introduction and Conclusion)

Thesis:

- I. First major topic
 - a. First minor point
 - b. Second minor point
- II. Second major topic
 - a. First minor point
 - b. Second minor point
- III. Third major topic
 - a. First minor point
 - b. Second minor point

*In an outline, the subdivisions are optional, but if used in a formal outline, every “a” must have a “b” and every “1” must have a “2”.

Example 2 (With Introduction and Conclusion)

- I. Introduction
 - a. Thesis:
- II. First major topic
 - a. First minor point
 - b. Second minor point
- III. Second major topic
 - a. First minor point
 - b. Second minor point
- IV. Third major topic
 - a. First minor point
 - b. Second minor point
- V. Conclusion