

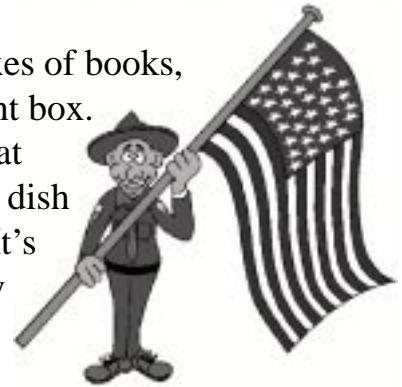
Intermediate
B1
Progression

Outlines: Idea Packages

This lesson will help you experience how outlines work as idea organizers.

In our basement, among lots of boxes of books, there is one larger but lighter-weight box.

Open it, and on top you'll see a green derby hat. Under the hat you'll find turkey-shaped candles, colored plastic eggs, a red dish in the shape of a heart, and plates decorated with fireworks. It's our Holiday Decorations box. (Christmas decorations occupy several boxes of their own.)



Suppose I decide to get our scrambled holiday decorations in better order.

I would assemble some **smaller boxes**, then **label** the boxes and **sort** the decorations. When the next Valentine's Day comes around, I wouldn't have to dig through layers of Easter grass and New Year's noisemakers.

Organization makes life easier—in a home, in an office, in a life, and in your writing.

Principle: Well-organized writing helps keep your reader with you.

Secondary principle: Disorganized writing confuses your reader.

The next part of this lesson was a struggle for me. Books about writing always tell you to organize your ideas into an **outline** before you write. But I almost never outline before I write! How can I advise you to do what I don't do?

Well, **while I don't make formal outlines, I do make lists.** From these lists emerge my main topics and subtopics. As I work with the ideas, I come to see which subjects are most important, which are less important, which are smaller parts of a larger subject, and which don't belong at all. **An outline is a way to organize an idea list.**

Saved! I can write this lesson without being a hypocrite!

There are several standard outline formats. They are all variations on the same basic structure. You start with your broadest, most general categories on the *left*. You become more specific as you work your way *down and right*. Like this:



I. Topic
A. Subtopic
1. Detail
a. Detail of the detail

NOTE: If your outline has a **I.**, then it has to have a **II.**; if it has an **A.**, then it has to have a **B.**, and so forth. Reason: If you don't have a **II.**, then your **I.** is actually the subject of your work. If you don't have a subtopic **B.**, then your **A.** is actually a topic.

Incorrect:

- I. French fries
 - A. Problems
 - 1. Greasy
 - 2. Burned
- II. Places to eat fries
 - A. Fast food places
 - 1. Harmonious Hamburgers
 - B. At home
 - 1. Frozen
 - 2. Homemade
 - C. County Fair
 - 1. 4-H booth

Better:

- I. Problems with French fries
 - A. Greasy
 - B. Burned
- II. Places to eat fries
 - A. Harmonious Hamburgers
 - B. At home
 - 1. Frozen
 - 2. Homemade
 - C. 4-H booth at county fair



Now you will come up with an outline of your own. No fair just expanding on our French fry outline. Choose a topic from the following list, or invent an original topic (hey, you're a creative person!).

challenges I have faced
 what to do when you're bored
 the problem with telephones
 why people should laugh more

moods I go through
 how to show patriotism
 things I can't explain
 stuff I have found

Set a time limit. **Brainstorm a bunch of words and phrases** about your topic. **Cut out any ideas** which don't fit. **Organize the remaining ideas into an outline.**

Here are two good methods to record your ideas and organize them for your outline:

(1) **Use scratch paper.** Make lists, draw arrows to re-arrange the ideas, cross out, add new ones, cut and tape the paper.

(2) **Use index cards.** Write one idea per card, then shuffle them into the order you want. Some cards will wind up in a discard pile!