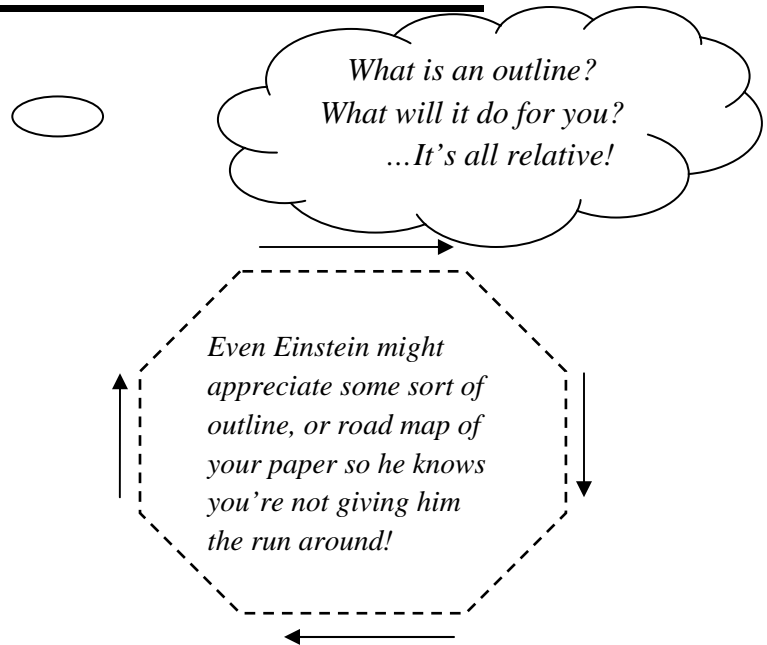


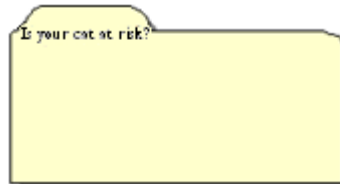
Five Ways to Approach the Outline



If you feel bogged down by the mechanics of the "1, 2, 3 -- A, B, C" approach, you'll be pleased to know there are different ways to put your ideas and information in order....

1) Think in "file-folders": You can think of your topic sentences as folders with labels. The four "file folders" that one could develop for a feline cancer paper would also serve guidelines for the progression of the body of your paper. The files would be labeled:

- Is your cat at risk?*
- Protecting your cat from cancer*
- Detecting the signs of cancer*
- Choosing a treatment plan*



2) Ask yourself what questions a reader would ask: Sometimes, simply jotting down a list of questions is all you need to define the basic areas your paper will cover, and even the order in which you might wish to cover them. What would a reader want to know about this subject? Make a list of those questions. For example, a reader interested in cancer in cats might want to know:

- How common is cancer in cats?*
- What kinds of cancer affect cats?*
- What cats are at greatest risk?*
- How can I tell if my cat has cancer?*
- What can I do if my cat has cancer?*
- What kinds of treatments are available to me?*
- What are their success rates?*
- What are their risks to my cat?*

- How long will my cat live if it has cancer?
- Can I prevent my cat from getting cancer?
- Where do I go to get more help?

3) List events or concepts chronologically: What happened first? What happened next? What happened after that? What happened last? This approach works well for an essay that focuses on events that occurred over time—e.g., a historical piece, a personal profile, etc. For example, women's magazines often publish stories of how a family coped with a child's illness. A chronological outline of such an article might look like this:

- Family notices something isn't right with the child
- Family goes to traditional doctor
- Family gets reassurances, goes home
- Child gets worse
- Family seeks more help; gets more reassurances
- Child gets worse
- Family gets desperate; seeks more information
- Family finds special doctor/support group/information on line
- Family locates specialist/special treatment/new cure
- Family is warned of risks of treatment
- Family goes ahead with treatment
- Child gets better

4) List points in logical order: Many how-to articles have an obvious logical order: do this first, do this next, do this next, and do this last. Your outline here may simply consist of a list of things to do and the order in which the reader should do them. This works well for a description essay, for example, a how-to paper, or a travel piece.

5) Make a list: List all the pieces of information that you'd like to include in the article. Then, go over that list and assign numbers to each item based on its importance or priority. For example, if you're writing a piece on ways to improve communication between spouses, write down a list of all the suggestions you want to cover. Which tips are most important? Which are less important? Which could be omitted without any real harm to your article? You may find, when you're done, that you have a selection of key points, and perhaps a few "leftovers" that aren't as useful. In some cases, your list may become the actual structure of your finished paper ("Five ways to improve communication with your spouse"); in others, it may become the "hidden" structure that underlies your piece, even though you aren't numbering the points in the final paper.

Once you've mastered a few alternatives to the classic, hated approach to outlines, you'll find that organizing your material -- and your article -- is even easier than A,B,C!

Adapted from Moira Allen's "The Outline Demystified" <www.writing-world.com/basics/outline.shtml>