

Outlining

UWF Writing Lab

CHECKLIST: Points to Remember in Making an Outline

1. Keep the outline brief--from four to seven major headings (including introduction and conclusion).
2. Restrict the subheadings as well: resubdivide if a sequence becomes longer than five or six.
3. Ordinarily, sketch in the main topics before working with the subheads.
4. Do not subdivide into less than two.
5. Make sure that all subpoints go to support their points and that all major points go to support the thesis.
6. Keep the headings in each sequence grammatically parallel.
7. Be consistent in the use of symbols.
8. Do not be afraid to revise.

GUIDELINES: The Introduction of an Expository Composition

1. Purpose: To present the thesis interestingly
 - a) To lead into the subject and generally into some statements of thesis
 - b) To interest the reader in the subject
2. Include:
 - a) (always) A lead into the subject
 - b) (almost always) A statement of (or some expression of) thesis
 - c) (often) A statement of the “although” clause and/or an explication of the “although” clause
 - d) (sometimes) A clarification of approach or explication of structure
 - e) (never) Any arguments for the thesis
3. Arrangement
 - a) Thesis statement (or expression) last or near the last
 - b) If there is material after the thesis, it should be limited to
 - (1) Restatements or amplifications of the thesis.
 - (2) A transitional sentence on structural matters

The Introductory Question.

The question is a highly useful device. Inherent in it linguistically are two important rhetorical advantages: (1) Since by its very nature a question involves direct communication between author and reader, it has the ability to involve the reader personally in whatever the author has to say. (2) Since a question asks, it presupposes an answering which gives the author a quick means into the thesis by way of reply. An author can capitalize upon these two features in a number of ways, as in these introductions:

Who are You? You singly, not you together. When did it start--that long day's journey into self? When do you really begin to know what you believe and where you're going? When do you know that you are unique--separate--alone? (Mary Mannes, “Who am I?” F and S, p. 5)

You ask me what is poverty? Listen to me. (Jo Goodwin Parker, "What is Poverty?" F and S, p. 160)

The illustrations above are both examples of an introductory question leading to a thesis reply: "What is the subject about? Well, I'll give you my view of it." But the introductory question can be used with equal effectiveness to set up an "although" clause :

Remember Woodstock? Remember how the radical press attacked the biggest rock festival in the history of the world (450,000 people) because it was a business that was going to make a profit of \$1 million by selling us our own music? Remember how so many kids came they couldn't collect tickets, and a quarter of a million people got in for free? And remember how the promoters announced that they lost \$1 million, and how everyone called that victory for the people? Well, the promoters made plenty of money, it turns out. (Jon Winter, "Woodstock Revisited," F and S, p. 462)

The Pointedly Brief Statement.

Because most mature writing is expressed in sentences developed by amplifying and qualifying phrases and clauses, a blunt affirmative statement of only a few words arrests the eye and startles the mind into attention. These openings may be flat statements of fact, but the brevity and the simplicity of the phrasing gives them an aphoristic quality:

Prehistory is mute. (A. Marshack, "Symbols of Ice Age Man")

We fear what we don't understand. (John Wideman, "Fear in the Streets,")

This device also lends itself well to the establishment of a tone of colloquial informality:

Well, the fraternity house still exists. (Herbolt Gold, "Letter From a Far Frat,")

We have seen a wonder. (C.P. Snow, "The Moon Landing," F and S, p. 232)

The Anecdote.

Authors sometimes capitalize on the universal appeal of storytelling leading into their thesis by narrating a relevant anecdote or, more frequently, an incident of personal significance:

Last week I had for about the hundredth time an experience that always disturbs me. Riding on a train, I found myself talking with my seatmate, who asked me what I did for a living. "I teach English." Do you have any trouble predicting his response? His face fell, and he groaned, "Oh, dear, I'll have to watch my language." (Wayne C. Booth, "Boring from Within: The Art of the Freshman Essay," Norton, P. 202.