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The essay outline template

with directions for teaching students to build and use it

The best graphic organizers are those students can make themselves on the spur of the moment without having to go to a web site or find a paper the teacher handed out a week ago Tuesday.

For teaching essay development, I use a series of graphic organizers that students can create themselves. I show students how to use each organizer as I introduce the stage of the writing process for which that organizer is used.

Each of my graphic organizers is a simple table that functions as a building block. By rearranging the blocks, students can build different outline templates to accommodate different types of essays.

In this PDF, I'll show how you or your students can create an essay outline template using a word processor's table functions. You can do the same thing just as fast on graph paper or on lined notebook paper with a pencil and ruler.

Have students make the template themselves rather than giving them one.

Making the template is an opportunity for a hands-on activity directly related to students' writing. You can let them modify the basic organizer with scissors and tape or by working on a computer. Either hands-on activity helps students see how the elements are repeated to create an essay pattern.

Also, seeing the whole template before they've mastered its parts scares students. They do much better if you show them small units of the writing process (such as the [thesis builder](#) or the whole [writing skeleton™](#)) and build up to the template. If you teach the outline template in sections while teaching the expository writing process, students will internalize the template as they use it.

The elements discussed in the template are the same ones my [Talk It Out](#) essay preparation materials guide students through. If you have that package, you'll find this outline template package fits it perfectly.

For most essays and research papers students write, the level of detail in this outline template is more than adequate. If for some reason a student needs a formal sentence outline, s/he can make a copy of the completed template, convert the table to text, and format the document with standard outline symbols.

For best results, every row in the outline template needs to be written as one complete sentence. Beginning writers need the security of a full-sentence outline.

I build my template by combining graphic organizers. My graphic organizer for the **thesis statement** looks like this:

Topic of the essay	assertion about the essay topic
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The organizer has two parts because [the thesis has two parts: a topic and an assertion about that topic](#).

The graphic organizer for the [topic sentence](#) of the first body paragraph (which is the first point of the writing skeleton™) looks like this:

1	Thesis + because + [reason statement]
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The graphic organizers for the topic sentences of other body paragraphs will be identical to the first one except that they'll have a different number.

When I am teaching, I create the writing skeleton™ by combining the thesis statement graphic organizer and the topic sentence graphic organizer, like this:

Topic of the essay	assertion about the essay topic
1	Thesis + because + [reason statement]
2	Thesis + because + [reason statement]
3	Thesis + because + [reason statement]

My organizer for **each piece of evidence** to support a topic sentence looks like this:

	The first piece of evidence is summarized in a sentence here.
	The source of this evidence is [name] who is an expert on this topic because [explain]
	I found this evidence [where].

The source and citation information are not normally part of an essay outline. However, putting the information with the summary makes it easy for student writers to keep material together. It gives them confidence they have everything they need before they sit down to compose their essays.

When they have all the elements, students combine them to create a template like the one on the next page. The directions for doing it begin on page 4.

Essay Outline Template for a 5-Paragraph Essay

Topic of the essay	assertion about the essay topic
1	Thesis + because + [reason statement]
A.	The first piece of evidence is summarized in a sentence here.
	The source of this evidence is [name] who is an expert on this topic because [explain]
	I found this evidence [where].
B	The second piece of evidence is summarized in a sentence here.
	The source of this evidence is [name] who is an expert on this topic because [explain]
	I found this evidence [where].
C	The third piece of evidence is summarized in a sentence here.
	The source of this evidence is [name] who is an expert on this topic because [explain]
	I found this evidence [where].
2	Thesis + because + [reason statement]
A	The first piece of evidence is summarized in a sentence here.
	The source of this evidence is [name] who is an expert on this topic because [explain]
	I found this evidence [where].
B	The second piece of evidence is summarized in a sentence here.
	The source of this evidence is [name] who is an expert on this topic because [explain]
	I found this evidence [where].
C	The third piece of evidence is summarized in a sentence here.
	The source of this evidence is [name] who is an expert on this topic because [explain]
	I found this evidence [where].
3	Thesis + because + [reason statement]
A	The first piece of evidence is summarized in a sentence here.
	The source of this evidence is [name] who is an expert on this topic because [explain]
	I found this evidence [where].
B	The second piece of evidence is summarized in a sentence here.
	The source of this evidence is [name] who is an expert on this topic because [explain]
	I found this evidence [where].
C	The third piece of evidence is summarized in a sentence here.
	The source of this evidence is [name] who is an expert on this topic because [explain]
	I found this evidence [where].

Create an essay template as a word processor table

First make a block 2 columns by 1 row to hold the thesis.

Topic will go here.	Assertion will go here.
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Make a basic block 4 columns by 4 rows. Adjust the columns to look like this:

1			
A			

Merge cells to the right of the top row number. Merge the cells to the right of the second row A. Merge the cells to the right of the grayed block in row 3 and row 4.

1	I colored this yellow to indicate it is part of the writing skeleton™.		
A			

To make a template for “5-paragraph essay,” make 8 more copies of the basic block. (It requires 9 blocks to give places to list a three-point writing skeleton and 3 pieces of evidence for each point.) You will delete rows to create the sections.

For the first body paragraph, leave the first block as it is.

1			
A			

Delete the top row of the second block and change the letter to B.

B			

Delete the top row of the third block and change the letter to C.

C			

For the second body paragraph, change the 1 to a 2. Leave everything else alone.

2		
A		

Delete the top row of the next block and change the letter to B.

B		

Delete the top row of the next block and change the letter to C.

C		

For the second body paragraph, change the 1 to a 3. Leave everything else alone.

3		
A		

Delete the top row of the next block and change the letter to B.

B		

Delete the top row of the last block and change the letter to C.

C		

Take out any unnecessary space between the blocks.

That's all there is to making the basic outline template;
however, if you want it super simple.....

I have put the template into the public folder of my Dropbox for you to download. You may download any (or all) of three versions to enable you to provide students with the template in a format that's easy for them to use.

The chart below shows the file type, a short link, and the full link for folks prohibited from using short links.

FILE TYPE	SHORT LINK	FULL LINK
RichTextFile	http://bit.ly/yuqSze	http://dl.dropbox.com/u/11657805/ThesisSupportOutlineTemplateRTF.rtf
Word doc	http://bit.ly/xD9IDt	http://dl.dropbox.com/u/11657805/ThesisSupportOutlineTemplateWord.doc
OpenOfficedoc	http://bit.ly/z9Ercz	http://dl.dropbox.com/u/11657805/ThesisSupportOutlineTemplateOpenOffice.odt

If you wish to simply provide your students with the short links to the files I've prepared, you may do that.

If you want to download a copy of the template and modify it, you may do that, providing you acknowledge that the original came from me. You can then put your modified versions into an online storage area that your students can access. Don't choose Dropbox because it's what I use. *Writing Points* ran a series of articles about free online storage options in the [May](#), [June](#), and [July 2011](#) issues. Check there for options that are school-friendly.

FYI: The original version of this document recommended use of Google docs. Since Google's March 1, 2012 revision of its privacy policy to one that allows no opt-out other than to not use any Google service, I can no longer recommend Google.

I suggest you let your principal, your school media personnel, and public library personnel know that you making information available as downloadable Google docs.

Many students do not have home computers with Internet access and may need to use public access terminals where download capability may be limited or nonexistent. Learn your public library policies. If students are prohibited from downloading files, find out if they can create documents in Word or OpenOffice. If so, they can use copy and paste to make their own outline the templates you share.

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