



An outline is a tool for organizing information and creating one is an important step in your preparation for writing. An outline includes the main ideas of what you have read or plan to communicate, and underneath them lists the details that support the main ideas. Remember, though, that an outline is only a framework—the essay you write from it must be fleshed out. But if you make sure that your outline is thorough and well thought out, writing the final product will be much easier.

HOW TO CREATE AN OUTLINE

- 1. Order your material.** Decide what information you want to emphasize. Order or classify your material with that in mind. Then determine what information belongs in an introduction, what should make up the body of the essay or report, and what should be left for the conclusion.
- 2. Identify main ideas.** Identify the main ideas to be presented in each section and use these ideas as your outline's main headings.
- 3. List supporting details.** Determine what important details or facts support each main idea. Rank and list these details as subheadings under each main idea, using more levels of subheadings as needed. Keep in mind that you must have at least two entries under each subheading: no *A*'s without *B*'s, no *I*'s without *2*'s, no *a*'s without *b*'s.
- 4. Put your outline to use.** Organize your essay or report according to your finished outline. Each main heading in the outline, for example, might form the basis for a topic sentence to begin a paragraph. Subheadings would then make up the content of the paragraph. In a more lengthy paper, each subheading might be the main idea of a paragraph.

PRACTICING YOUR SKILL

To practice your skill, examine the outline below, which could be used in preparation for writing about the Louisiana Purchase. Notice the several levels of headings that make up the various parts of the outline. Then answer the questions that follow.

- I. Republicans' support of westward expansion
 - A. Settlement of the Trans-Appalachian West
 - B. Access to the Mississippi River
 - 1. Significance of the port of New Orleans
 - 2. Spain's returning Louisiana to France
 - a. Threat to U.S. trade
 - b. Barrier to U.S. expansion westward
- II. President Jefferson's negotiations with France
 - A. America's purchase of Louisiana
 - B. Why France sold Louisiana
 - 1. Napoleon's failure to build empire in the Americas
 - a. Need for naval base in West Indies
 - b. Revolt in Saint Domingue (now Haiti)
 - c. French failure to regain control of Haiti
 - 2. Napoleon's need of money for war plans

1. How many levels of headings are included in the outline above?
2. What are the two main ideas contained in the outline?
3. Why did the fact that France regained control of Louisiana cause the United States concern?
4. For what two reasons did France decide to sell Louisiana to the United States?