The Outline

An outline is the skeleton of your paper. It contains the major ideas of your paper and should develop your thesis. The first and second levels are for your major ideas or generalizations while the third (and fourth) levels contain supporting details of the major ideas. The following rules must be observed:

1. The outline should contain at least two items on each level. For example, it must have a II to match the I, a B to match the A, and a 2 to match the 1.

2. The main points (I, II, etc.) must relate directly to the thesis statement. The sub-points must relate to the points on the level above them.

3. A sentence outline should consist of all sentences.

4. A topic outline may contain as points words, phrases, and dependent clauses.

5. Do not use compound sentences in an outline. If you have two equal points to make, divide that part of your outline into two.

6. The outline should contain parallel structure.

7. The outline does not contain the introduction and conclusion of your paper. It covers only the body of the essay.

8. When writing about literature, the points of the outline should always be in the present tense. Huckleberry Finn is rebellious, not was.

9. The first letter of each point should be capitalized.

10. A period should be placed after each introductory number or letter, such as I. or A. and at the end of each sentence.

11. Space the outline correctly with each number or letter introducing a sub-point going directly beneath the first letter of the one above it. Alignment of symbols in an outline is important.

12. Observe the rules of grammar and good style in your outline. For example, avoid the passive voice and the use of expletives (There is..., It was..., etc.).

13. The outline usually does not contain transitional words in it other than pronouns.