

Creating an Outline for a Research Paper

You've done all your research and found a ton of information on your topic. Before you start writing your paper, take time to create an outline. This will help you organize your information and make the writing process smoother.



We use Roman numerals for an outline. Each Roman numeral stands for a paragraph:

- I. Introduction
- II. First subtopic
- III. Second subtopic
- IV. Third subtopic
- V. Conclusion

This is a good start, but it's even better if we can have a better idea of what will be in each paragraph. For the parts of each paragraph, such as support and examples, we use capital letters. Here's an example outline for a report on volcanic islands:

- I. Introduction
 - A. Interesting fact about volcanic islands
 - B. Topic sentence
- II. How volcanic islands form
 - A. Tectonic plates move
 - B. Magma rises
 - C. Magma breaks the surface of the water and cools to form the island
- III. Where volcanic islands are located
 - A. List of major volcanic islands
 - B. Visual aid: map
- IV. What life is like on volcanic islands
 - A. Example: Hawai'i
 - B. Example: Honshu
 - C. Example: Iceland
- V. Conclusion

Your outline may be longer or shorter than this; that's fine. This is just an example. Notice I don't need full sentences here. I just need notes to tell myself what information to put in what place. Notice also I've indicated where my visual aid is going. It's hard to tell from this, but I've also thought about how one topic flows to the next. It makes sense to start with how these islands form in the first place. Once I've told the reader how they form, I want to show them where. After showing the reader where they are in the world, I can narrow in on a few examples with more detail. It's important to think about how one subtopic leads to another when creating your outline.

Your turn! Take the information you've gathered from your research and put it into an outline.
