

Outlining a Book Report

You've been asked to write a book report on a favorite book. Specifically, you should have chosen aspects of the book that you especially enjoyed (plot, character, setting, the author's style, the theme, etc.). You probably chose about two - four aspects of the book to discuss.



When creating an outline, you can take it in stages. First, decide what you're going to discuss and how to order them in your paper. For example, if I were going to write a brief paper on one of my favorite books, *Moby-Dick*, my first outline might look like this:

- I. Introduction
- II. Character
- III. Writer's style
- IV. Themes
- V. Conclusion

Your turn! Write a brief outline, like mine above, on your book and what aspects of it you like best:

Next, let's flesh this out a little. Instead of just saying what you like, be more specific about why you like it or what you like about it. This is still going to focus on your opinions. Here's my example with this next step:

- I. Introduction
- II. Writer's style
 - A. Vivid imagery
 - B. Excellent use of figurative language
 - C. Humorous
 - D. Terrific dialogue
- III. Characters
 - A. Excellent description of and development of characters
 - B. Wide range of fascinating characters
 - C. Sensitive depictions of characters of various nationalities and social classes

[continued]

IV. Themes

- A. Our universal human condition
- B. The dangers of vengeance
- C. The importance of friendship and human bonds

V. Conclusion

Did you spot that I switched items II and III from my first outline? This is because as I expanded my outline, I realized that when talking about the writer's style, I could end with a section on the dialogue and that would naturally lead to talking about the characters. Also, the last item in "Characters" can lead me to themes. Look for these sorts of connections when creating your outline to improve the flow of your paper.

Your turn! Extend your outline, following the model above:

Finally, let's do one last expansion of our outlines. This time you're going to include what support you're giving from the book for each opinion you have. You can quote specific lines from the book (this can be especially good for things like writer's style, but can be used in other places too), or you can summarize. Here's an example using just item III, above:

III. Characters

- A. Excellent description of and development of characters
 - 1. Ishmael's development through his opening narration
 - 2. Waiting to meet Ahab
 - 3. Discuss the chapters about whales
- B. Wide range of fascinating characters
 - 1. Quote lines about Queequeg on pp. X-xx
 - 2. Contrast the mates Starbuck and Stubb
- C. Sensitive depictions of characters of various nationalities and social classes
 - 1. Summarize treatment of captain and mates vs. crew
 - 2. Quotes about Native Americans, black slaves, and foreigners

Here you can see that I quote, summarize, or discuss what is in the book. You can choose from these as well.

Your turn! Extend your outline one last time, following the model above:
