

Outlining

In speech, we write outlines. Unless you have been given a specific assignment to “write” an actual manuscript-based speech, the outline is the most writing you will do for this class. The purpose of an outline is to assist you in organizing your main thoughts and the research material to support them. Think of the outline as the skeleton of your speech. It provides structure and shape. The words you choose to fill in around that structure is the actual narrative of your presentation. The words might be different in front of one audience than another; something might have happened to change part of your speech overnight if you are dealing with contemporary events. But the outline will allow you to figure out where to make changes, how to re-order the main parts to fit the needs of your audience, and what you meant to say. Even better, the outline provides a schematic that allows you to visualize the structure of your speech. What if one

part of the speech as four main sub-points and an equally important part has only one sub-point? You move parts of the outline around to create balance.

Outlining format is very simple, yet precise. The various levels of the outline have either numbers or letters. The most important, really big points, use capitalized Roman numerals: I, II, III, IV. The sub-points that help support the Roman numerals are capital letters: A, B, C. Underneath, to support each of the sub-points, we go back to using numbers, only this time Arabic numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Each subsequent level alternates from numbers to letters.

I
 A
 1
 2
 3
 B
 1
 2
II
 A
 B
 1
 2
 C
 1
 2
 3
III
 A

1
2
B

If you need more levels, then you keep alternating numbers and letters. After the Arabic numbers, lower-case letters would follow: a, b, c. Finally, you would use lower-case Roman numerals: i, ii, iii, iv.

WARNING: You don't want to have five or six levels of sub-points in any one major category for a classroom speech. You'll simply run out of time to get through your presentation if the amount of detail is that great. Look at your presentation and ask yourself: Is there possibly an entire speech in this one main point? If you have so much information that you cannot leave anything out, then re-define your topic and re-number the outline using that one main point as the entire speech.

Types of Outlines

While doing your research and developing support for your thesis, you are building a working outline. The working outline is often a list of brainstorming ideas you've had about the topic and some general information you've come across while browsing topic ideas on the web or in journals. One reason that we encourage public speaking students to choose topics with which they are familiar or in which they have an

interest is because a working outline can emerge from simply sitting down to make an organized list of what one already knows about a topic. Your research fills in the gaps and expands the sub-points.

A solid research question usually contains all the necessary elements of a working outline. If you are asking “Why is it important for students to manage credit card debt?”, then your working outline consists of three main points: defining credit card debt, managing debt, and the specific effects of debt-management on students with credit cards. As you begin doing research to support your topic, all you have to do is seek information that answers the research question and fleshes out the three main points. The working outline helps you decide what to research and where to arrange the information that you are finding. The working outline is a draft document and is supposed to change as you find information to add to the initial sub-points.

Once you’ve done your research and your speech is taking shape, you are ready to develop your final outline. While your instructor will specify which type of outline they will require that you turn in, most finished outlines for public speaking will be either key word or full sentence outlines.

A key word outline does not bother with rules of grammar or complete sentences. After each of the letters and

numbers on your outline, you will write a phrase or word that brings to mind everything you want to say about that part of your topic.

For example:

- I. Credit Card Debt
 - A. Average amount/person
 - 1. Cost per month (\$47)
 - 2. Types of purchases
 - B. Too many cards
 - 1. Offers in the mail
 - 2. Places to buy

This example of a key word outline reminds you in which order you want to present your main points and sub-points, but it leaves all of the narrative up to you at the time you practice and perform your speech.

Even if your instructor requires a full sentence outline, you'll want to put the key word outline on your note cards. The fewer words on your note cards and the less reading you do in front of the class, the more you'll maximize your eye contact and your ethos. If you can't remember what you wanted to say about a phrase you've written on the notecard, either write an additional word or practice, practice, practice until you remember why that piece of information is important.

The full sentence outline uses complete sentences with punctuation after each of the outline letters and numbers. It is not your complete speech written out in outline form, but is a full sentence arrangement of your main ideas. For example:

- I. Credit Card Debt is a mounting problem among working Americans.
 - A. The average amount of debt per person in 2005, according to *MoneyMagazine*, is now over \$5,000 per card.
 - 1. The cost for this debt can be \$47 per month.
 - 2. Most of the purchases on these credit cards are surprisingly small.
 - B. For most Americans, the problem is simply too many cards.
 - 1. Everyone gets offers in the mail almost every week.
 - 2. Just about every type of business accepts credit cards.

Even though it looks like you could make a speech by simply “reading” these sentences one after another, the information that supports each of the statements is missing as are examples, narratives, and transitions. It’s amazing how short an outline for a five-minute speech might look when shorn of all of the narrative material. It’s also amazing how short

your presentation will be if it consists of no more than stringing together a bunch of main ideas!

Main Points

Each major point, those that are listed as upper case Roman numerals, should be a complete, stand-alone main idea. The main points actually can be shuffled to appeal to different audiences or meet the demands of different sorts of speeches. All the speaker does is create new transitions to move from one main point to the next. Each main point should be fully supported with organized sub-points that each include examples, narratives, data from research, and transitions.

For example:

- I. Credit Card Debt
 - A. Average amount/person
 - 1. Cost per month (\$47)
 - 2. Types of purchases
 - B. Too many cards
 - 1. Offers in the mail
 - 2. Places to buy
- II. Managing Debt
 - A. Types of debt among college students
 - B. Advice on limiting debt
 - C. How to get out of debt

Note that main points I and II could be reversed.

- I. Managing Debt
 - A. Types of debt among college students
 - B. Advice on limiting debt
 - C. How to get out of debt

- II. Credit Card Debt
 - A. Average amount/person
 - 1. Cost per month (\$47)
 - 2. Types of purchases
 - B. Too many cards
 - 1. Offers in the mail
 - 2. Places to buy

This simply changes the focus of the speech, not the thesis. And all it takes to move around your main points is a careful transition to remind the audience of the relationships among the sections.

As a speaker, it is your responsibility to create the transitions that tie together seemingly unrelated topics to support your thesis statement. In the example above, college students are identified immediately as my target audience and it's apparent from the lack of sub-sub-points in the first major section that this will be a short, introductory section establishing background on the issue of debt among college students.

Once you've developed your main points, check to see that they fully support your thesis statement as you've written it out in the conclusion. Everything you say in the course of your presentation should be aimed at supporting fully whatever you want us to agree with at the end of the speech. Using the main points you've arranged and developed, outline your conclusion and – finally – develop your introduction.

Transitions

We use transitions all of the time in conversation but we're not always aware of them. Words like “then” and “next” and “not only that, but ...” are all transition words and phrases. When it is time to think up narrative transitions for a speech, all you need to do is state in a full sentence where the speech is going next and how it relates to the previous point. For example, after establishing that college students are crushed under a huge load of debt, how to limit debt, and information on how to get out of debt, the speaker would prepare the audience for the second major point of the speech by saying, “While managing debt is a problem for everyone in the U.S., the worst offender for college students today is credit card debt.” That's it. The transition can be just one

sentence that summarizes the previous main point and previews the next.

A transition is never an announcement of the next main point such as “The next part of my speech is about ...” A transition is a deliberate statement which alerts the audience to a shift in the narrative from one point to the next. Remember that the audience has to have help to keep straight the various points you are making because you can’t back up and re-state your case or give them a printed version of the speech to follow and ponder. It’s your job as a speaker to make sure that the audience is fully aware of where you are in the presentation and how each section of the speech relates to the next.