

CREATING A FORMAL OUTLINE

Thesis:

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Definition, Description, and History (as appropriate)
- B. Statement of Purpose
- C. Information Sources (including research methods and materials)
- D. Working Definitions (if appropriate)
- E. Limitations of the Report (if appropriate)
- F. Scope of Coverage (sequence of major topics in the body)

II. BODY

- A. First Major Topic
 - 1. First subtopic of A
 - 2. Second subtopic of A
 - a. First subtopic of 2
 - b. Second subtopic of 2
 - (1) (And so on—subdivision carried as far as necessary)
- B. Second Major Topic
 - 1. (and so on)

III. CONCLUSION (where everything is tied together)

A good outline also conforms to the following guidelines:

- It obeys the “rule of two”: each “main topic” should contain at least two subtopics; subtopics, if followed by sub-subtopics, should again contain at least two.

Portion of a “poor” outline	Portion of a “good” outline
II. Body A. First Major Topic B. Second Major Topic 1. Subtopic a. Sub-subtopic C. Third Major Topic	II. Body D. First Major Topic 1. Subtopic 2. Subtopic a. Sub-subtopic b. Sub-subtopic c. Sub-subtopic E. Second Major Topic

- It avoids overlap: each topic addresses a distinct idea.
- It maintains coherence: subtopics and sub-subtopics relate directly to their major topics, rather than leading reader and writer off on tempting tangents.
- It maintains internal parallelism: all items at any given level are grammatically-similar

Parallelism violated:	Parallelism maintained:
<p>A. Definitions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is a dialect? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. distinguishing features of dialect b. a dialect is not just slang expressions such as “getting jiggy with it” 2. Ebonics <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. working definition b. What did Labov write about it? c. later work on Black English 	<p>B. Definitions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is a dialect? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. distinguishing features of dialect b. common misconceptions concerning dialect 2. What is Ebonics? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. a working definition b. Labov’s analysis of Black English c. later scholarly analyses of Black English

- It provides clear and informative headings

Not informative	Informative
<p>B. The Portrayal of Ebonics in North American Newspapers</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the <u>Globe and Mail</u> portrayals 2. the <u>New York Times</u>’ portrayals 3. the <u>Washington Post</u>’s portrayals 	<p>B. The Portrayal of Ebonics in North American Newspapers</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the <u>Globe & Mail</u>'s association of Ebonics, African-Americans, and inner-city crime 2. the <u>New York Times</u>' association of African-American English with poor school performance 3. the <u>Washington Post</u>'s portrayal of Ebonics as defective and lazy use of English.

By the time you have created an effective formal outline, you will be ready to write a first draft of your paper. Indeed, many writers work from rough, skeletal outlines to create first, exploratory drafts, and only then, after revising those drafts, do they commit themselves to a formal outline.

Note, too, that some writers do not find the need to use a formal outline; by the time they have created a first draft from their initial, organizational “skeleton,” they are ready to stick with that draft, revising and fine-tuning it, until they feel they have accomplished their purpose.

Thesis: Much of the debate on Ebonics displays misinformation about what exactly a dialect is. Misinformation propagated by North

American newspapers, alone, includes unjustified negative value judgements and the belief that Ebonics is simply slang.

I. Introduction

- A. A brief overview of the Ebonics debate; a brief definition of Ebonics
- B. Purpose: to show the extent to which public portrayals of Ebonics is linguistically misguided
- C. Information sources and methodology: critical textual analysis of newspaper articles in the Globe and Mail, New York Times, and Washington Post from 1994-1998; a survey of linguistic studies of Ebonics from _____ to _____.
- D. Scope: _____

I Body

1. Definitions

- 1. What is a dialect?
 - 1. distinguishing features of dialect
 - 2. common misconceptions concerning dialect
- 2. What is Ebonics?
 - 1. a working definition
 - 2. Labov's analysis of Black English
 - 3. later scholarly analyses of Black English

A. The Portrayal of Ebonics in North American Newspapers

- 1. the Globe and Mail's association of Ebonics, African-Americans, and inner-city crime
- 2. the New York Times' association of African-American English with poor school performance
- 3. the Washington Post's portrayal of Ebonics as defective and lazy use of English

III Conclusion

- C. Linguists and the general public have radically different views on dialect in general and Ebonics in particular.
- D. Linguists should be involved in education of the general public on this critical issue.

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