Formal Outlining

Complex topics sometimes require a complex arrangement of ideas. Constructing a formal outline that is both tightly arranged and detailed can provide a visual confirmation of the main ideas and support as they should be arranged in an essay according to importance.

The principles of the formal outline are as follows:
- Labels and indentions indicate order and relative importance.
- Sections and subsections reflect logical relationships.
- Topics of equal generality appear in parallel headings.
- Each subdivision has at least two parts.
- Headings are expressed in parallel grammatical form.
- The introduction and conclusion may be omitted.

Labeling
- All parts are indented and labeled. Roman numerals (I, II) label the primary divisions of the essay.
- Indented capital letters (A, B) label secondary divisions.
- Farther indented Arabic numerals (1, 2) label principal supporting points and examples.
- A fourth level would be indented farther again and labeled with lower case letters (a, b).

There are two types of formal outlines: Sentence Outlines and Topic Outlines.

Example of a Sentence Outline
<div align="center">Outline</div>

Thesis statement: Government and business must ensure that libraries and schools have the hardware, connections, and training capabilities for computer technology to make Americans more rather than less equal.

I.   The digital divide is wide.
  A. People at poverty level have much less access to computer technology than middle- or upper class people do.
  B. People who are not online are at risk for missing important information.
II. Public libraries can provide internet access to those who do not own computers, but they face several challenges.
  A. Those who have no access to computers at work or school take advantage of library computers for internet access.
  B. Providing funding for internet access is challenging for libraries, especially.
  C. The FCC's E-Rate program is the most reliable funding source for library technology, but it is modest.
III. Schools offer many children their main exposure to computers, but computers raise educational as well as funding issues.

A. Some experts question the value of technology in the classroom, but evidence suggests that internet access can enhance learning.
   1. Some critics say technology undermines education.
   2. Some teachers say that technology fits in well with recent theories of education.
   3. Students in many schools are using the internet effectively.
B. Low-income students have less access to technology than high-income students do.
   1. Low-income students use the internet half as often.
   2. When low-income students have access to computers, they spend more time using instructional software.
IV. Governments and businesses must play a more active role in financing internet access for libraries and schools.
   A. The federal government must reverse the recent cuts in funding of the technology-assistance programs.
   B. Businesses must recognize their long-term interest in bringing potential employees online.

Example of a Topic Outline

Outline

Thesis statement: Government and business must ensure that libraries and schools have the hardware, connections, and training capabilities for computer technology to make Americans more rather than less equal.

I. A wide digital divide
   A. Less access to computer technology for poverty-level people
   B. Missed information for those not online
II. Challenges for public libraries offering internet access
   A. People who take advantage of library internet access
   B. Funding challenges for libraries offering internet access
   C. The FCC's E-Rate funding limitations
III. Issues with public schools that offer internet to students
   A. Internet access and enhanced learning
      1. Technology that undermines education
      2. Effective internet use in the classroom
      3. Recent theories in education
   B. Low-income students vs. high-income students
      1. Low-income students and internet access
      2. Instructional software for low-income students
IV. Financial support for internet access through the government and businesses
   A. Federal government support
   B. Business support

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