



## OUTLINING PAPERS

Outlining a paper makes writing easier for the writer and, hopefully, the argument clearer for the reader once the full paper is written. In this handout, four steps for incorporating outlining into your writing process will be explained. Then an example of an outline will be provided.

### **1. Write Your Thesis**

Do not wait to start formulating your argument. As you read, you will develop ideas for a thesis. Write them down. A working thesis, however rough, will guide the research process. If your thesis is arguing a certain angle or about a certain text, then works that do not address that issue can be set aside.

### **2. Write Your Methodology Statement**

When you have written your thesis, write your methodology statement. Again, do this as soon as possible. As soon as you write a possible thesis statement, write down the major points needed to support the argument. This will help to weed out poor thesis statements and guide your research. If you cannot make decent supporting points, then the thesis needs to be reworked. If you can make strong supporting points, then those are the areas that need to be researched.

### **3. Make Your Headings**

The first level subheadings should align with the main points of your methodology statement(s). Align them even down to the wording for each point. On the document that contains your working thesis and methodology statements, make the first level headings. Write and notate your research under these headings so that your argument stays organized. This also helps to create a rough draft even as you are researching.

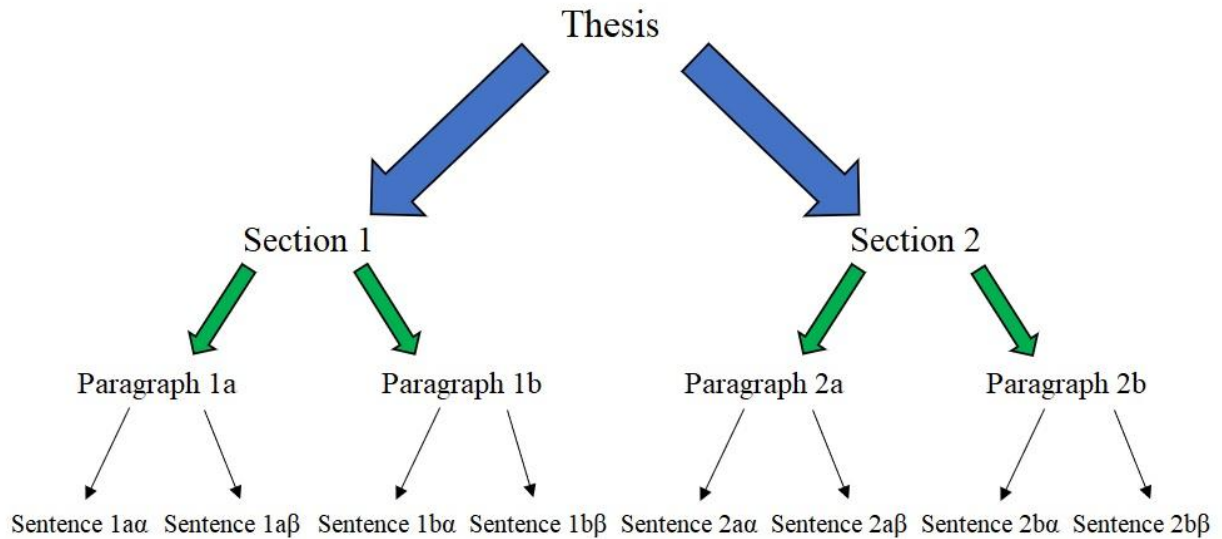
### **4. Detail and Revise**

Research will change your main points. As this happens, change the outline of the paper. Sometimes a main point cannot be argued or does not support your thesis. Then you must change your methodology point, thesis, or (most often) both. This should also change the heading for that section.

Once you have sufficient research/data to make one of the main points, write that section. As you write, make sure that each paragraph contributes to the main point. Often, it is helpful to have a statement in the first paragraph of the section outlining the sub points that each paragraph makes in contribution to the main point. Again, writing these paragraphs can frequently cause the main point of the section to change. Sometimes the research doesn't address the point you wanted to make initially or the argument shifts slightly from what you laid out. When that happens, do not be afraid to change. The paragraphs must support the main point. If the main

point changes, make sure that it still supports the thesis. If not, change the thesis or make a different main point.

Research papers are stacked arguments. Supporting sentences provide data and arguments for the topic sentence of the paragraph. The topic sentences of the paragraphs support the main point of the section and the main point of each section supports the thesis of the paper.



## GODS AND HEIRS: THE THEME OF PROGENY IN JOB (Sample Outline)<sup>1</sup>

**Thesis:** I will argue that Job's friends reference the destruction of his family in the dialogues to illustrate the divine retribution principle by tying God's control over human progeny to the barrenness of Job's household.

**Methodology:** First, an outline of the significance of family death and God's blessing of progeny in the Old Testament (OT) and ancient Near East. Second, the divine destruction of Job's family and his inability to restore them in Job 1. Third, the most prominent references to Job's children in the dialogues. Fourth, the restoration of Job's family in the epilogue.

### Death of the Family in the OT and Ancient Near East

1. Need for heirs is a common theme.<sup>2</sup>
  - a. Cause of distress in the OT
  - b. Large family is a blessing from God in the OT
  - c. Divine control over progeny is a focus in the phrasing and patriarchal blessing formulas
2. The father's name exists so long as it is attached to land
  - a. Inheritance of family property for father's household
  - b. Daughters of Zelophehad
  - c. Children and inheritance focus rather than the individual children themselves
3. Ugaritic texts
  - a. Kirta Epic and Tale of Aqhat briefly summarized
  - b. Both contain plea for eternal continuation of family line
  - c. Both call to the gods as the source of progeny and eternal life through heirs
4. Ancient Near East curse treaties
  - a. Hittite treaty curse formulas
  - b. Agricultural imagery
  - c. Focus upon God's ability to end the line of the offender by withholding heirs
5. Family is emphasized more than physical health in the ANE (summary paragraph)
  - a. Modern readers emphasize Job's illness but only see family at the beginning and end
  - b. With ANE background, ancient readers would have seen the family death more clearly

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<sup>1</sup> This is an outline of the first two sections of a paper that I published. Nicholas J. Campbell, "God and Heirs: The Theme of Progeny in Job," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 36, no. 1 (2022): 150–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09018328.2022.2085907>

<sup>2</sup> The numbered lines are paragraph topics while the lettered points are the supporting sentences/points within the paragraphs.

## Job 1 (Prologue)

### Blessing of God Turned to Death

1. Job's life is blessed by God.
  - a. The biblical text recognizes him as great.
  - b. He has a lot of family, livestock, and property.
  - c. Even children have their own houses and hold feasts
2. Job is pious and concerned for his children.
  - a. Text records him sacrificing for his children
  - b. He is not involved in the feast but still offers sacrifices for the children
  - c. The children have their own homes but he is still concerned for them
  - d. In the context, the sacrifices are likely intended to deter divine wrath
3. The destruction in verses 13–19 are sudden and unexpected after the idyllic introduction to Job's life.
  - a. The destruction narrative begins with children feasting which ties to the idyllic section but is unconnected to the initial destruction events.
  - b. The four-stage destruction builds in intensity.
  - c. The first and third destructions are animals taken by human agents.
  - d. The second and fourth destructions are acts of God.
4. The fourth event is the climax and ties to the feasting that begins the progression.
  - a. The feasting allows the children to be together and killed in a single event
  - b. Feasting did not seem to have a negative connotation.
  - c. However, the house blowing down is clearly an act of God.
5. The divine scene clarifies the origin of the destruction events.
  - a. Job had family and wealth because of God's blessing.
  - b. The loss of family and wealth also comes from the hand of God.
  - c. The divine scene does not add new information but simply clarifies what is already implied by the earthly scenes.