

1. How to Outline

I have devoted a large part of my career teaching study skills to seventh graders. One important study skill is the ability to take the most important information out of something you read or listen to and write it in a brief form so you can study it later. This is information processing.

I used to teach a wide variety of ways to do this, thinking that there would be some effective method for everyone. What actually happened is that there was no time to master every method and few students really got a strong handle on this skill. I recently decided to focus on teaching a single, best information processing method for the whole class, and then teach individuals who needed something different as the cases came up. Research shows that the best information processing method is outlining. Most other information processing methods are just variations on the traditional outline. Outlining is a bit more challenging at first than other methods and takes a little longer for young people to learn, but the effort is well worth it.

Mr. Jones

Like the other lessons in this series, these exercises are intended to help the seventh grader get started on an important scholarly skill. Remember that these exercises are not complete and that you will not be great at this until you have practiced for some months.

Why should you learn this?

Outlining ‘works’ because:

- It makes you organize information. This helps you remember it.
- It makes you decide what is important and what is not important. This helps you remember information.
- It supports your reading by making you try to understand the author’s ideas and how they fit together.

Here are sample outlines

<p>I. Fruit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. apples<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Macintosh2. Cortland3. Northern SpyB. bananasC. pears<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Bartlett2. Winter3. AnjouD. tomatoes<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Beefsteak2. Early Girl3. Roma <p>II. Vegetables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. root<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. carrot2. potato3. beetB. leafy<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. leaf lettuceC. legumes<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. beans	<p>I. Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. elementary<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. grades k-6B. junior high<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. grades 7-9C. senior high<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. grades 10-12 <p>II. Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. First Floor<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Mr. Smith2. Ms. Johnson3. Ms. GreenB. Second Floor<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Ms. Brown2. Mr. Mustard3. Ms. Scarlett <p>III. Support Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. CustodianB. Aide <p>IV. Administrators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. Superintendent<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Mrs. HughesB. Principal<ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Mr. LangstonC. Pupil Personnel Services
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Here is a sample outline of text

Original Text - 170 words	Outlined version - 96 words
<p>Many countries in Latin America had political and economic problems in 1900. They borrowed money from European countries and had difficulty repaying the loans.</p> <p>The United States feared that European nations would take control of the countries that owed them money. Britain, Germany, and Italy sent battleships to Venezuela in 1902. They wanted to force Venezuela to repay its loans. Venezuela asked the United States for help. President Roosevelt convinced the European nations to let the new Hague Tribunal, or World Court, settle the dispute.</p> <p>Foreign battleships in South America worried Roosevelt. In 1904, he revised the Monroe Doctrine. The United States would act as a “police” power in Latin America. The United States would try to solve any political or economic problem in a Latin American country. The United States could use the military to bring back order to a Latin American country. This was called the “Big Stick” policy. The policy was called that because Roosevelt often used an African saying, “Speak softly and carry a big stick...”</p> <p>(King 451)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Problems in Latin Amer. 1900 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. debt to Europe hard to repay II. US worries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Would Euro. Take control of Lat. Amer. Countries that owe \$\$? B. Battleships to Venezuela 1902 to force repay loans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Britain 2. Germany 3. Italy C. Roosevelt convinced them to let World Court handle it III. Roosevelt’s New Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. 1904 revise Monroe Doctrine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. US = police force in Lat. Amer. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Would try to solve problems in other countries b. Would use military to keep order 2. Called “Big Stick” policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. From African saying

Exercise 1: Creating Titles as a Way to identify Main Idea

Main ideas of paragraphs are **usually** found in the first sentence of the paragraph.

When outlining, do not try to take out every detail. Choose the details that are most important and include those.

Outlines should use as few words as possible. This makes it easier to study.

A good practice is to create questions from your outlines for study.

Invent a title for each of the following paragraphs. A **title** captures the main topic of the

1. Title: _____

Traces of the earliest human life in what is now the United States have been found at the Meadowcroft Rock Shelter, near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Artifacts uncovered at this site are believed to have been left there between 16,000 and 13,500 BCE. The route the Asian nomads may have taken to arrive at this site is still unclear. Nomads are people who do not live in one place. (King 3)

2. Title: _____

There are signs that show that people lived in Siberia (in Asia) as early as 30,000 years ago. During the Ice Age, much of the earth and Earth's water was frozen. The level of the ocean was much lower than it is today. A land bridge a thousand miles wide, known as Beringia, connected Siberia to Alaska. Most experts believe that hunters from Siberia crossed the land bridge to North America beginning in 20,000 BCE. They may have been following herds of caribou. (King 3)

3. Title: _____

Early American hunters began using spear points for hunting tools about 100,000 BCE. Names for the area of New Mexico in which it was found, the Clovis Point was a finely flaked stone spearhead. When attached to a wooden pole, the Clovis Point was a powerful tool for killing animals. It was also used for gathering and building. Clovis points have been found near bones of mammoths or bison. (King 4)

Exercise 2: Condensing in your own words

Rewrite the following passages in your own words. Use as few words as possible, including symbols and “text spelling”.

Passage 1:

Great Britain and Spain continued to interfere with Americans as they moved westward. The British sold firearms and whiskey to the American Indians in the north. The Indians were fighting to protect their land, which the settlers also claimed. War was likely if the British continued to cause trouble. (King 159)

Passage 2:

President Washington could not risk a war with the British and the American Indians. He sent John Jay to London in 1794 to discuss a treaty. Jay got the British to agree to leave their American forts. Americans would pay their debts to Britain. The British would repay American shippers for cargo they had seized. (King 159)

Passage 3:

Jay’s Treaty, as it was called, was not very popular with Congress. It did not protect American ships bound for France from being seized by the British. However, President Washington urged its approval in order to maintain peace with Britain. (King 159)

Exercise 3: Selecting what to keep and prioritizing

Cross out the words or phrases in each passage that you consider not important enough to keep.

Passage 1:

President Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor to advance his army beyond the Nueces River toward the Rio Grande in January 1846. The Mexican army remained quiet. February and March passed; there was still no action. Finally, on April 25, 1846, Mexican troops crossed the Rio Grande and killed many of General Taylor’s soldiers. The United States, in turn, declared

“Texting” is leading to new spelling variations for English. The purpose of “texting spelling” is to cut the number of letters down to a minimum to save time and space (and, if you’re charged by number of characters, save money!). “Texting spelling” is just perfect for note taking and outlining!

If you find yourself copying word-for-word from the text, it might mean you do not really understand what you are reading! Take care to translate the meaning into your own words and using as few words as possible without losing meaning.

war with its southern neighbor on May 13, 1846. This was the beginning of the Mexican War.
(King 263)

Passage 2:

Polk still wanted to extend the United States to the Pacific coast. He ordered American troops to invade California. The troops were led by Stephen W. Kearny, John D. Sloat, and John C. Fremont. They had very little trouble defeating the Mexicans. Meanwhile, Zachary Taylor fought his way into Mexico. "Old Rough and Ready", as he was called, won a major victory for the Americans at Buena Vista. (King 263)

Passage 3:

In early 1847, General Winfield Scott led a charge on Mexico City. Scott was an expert in preparing for battles. Because of his complete attention to every last detail, he was known as "Old Fuss and Feathers". At that time, many believed he was the country's most capable general. In September, Scott and his troops captured Mexico City. (King 263)

Exercise 4: Practice organizing these lists

A. Organize each list so that ONE of each list is set aside as the label for the other five.

Example: pizza, Italian food, spaghetti, ziti, pasta, cannoli → Italian food: pizza, spaghetti, ziti, pasta, cannoli

List 1: chicken, cow, pig, farm animal, rooster, sheep

List 2: red, green, colors, blue, yellow

List 3: presents, cake, candles, birthday, party

List 4: sneakers, shoes, footwear, sandals, high-heels, flip-flops

B. These lists can be organized into TWO categories. The category label is NOT included this time – you will have to make it up. Each category does not necessarily have the same number of words.

List 1: chicken, cow, hen, rooster, bull, goose, steer, chick

List 2: sunflower, sun, four-leaf clover, grass, leaves in summer, yellow highlighter

List 3: French fries, doughnuts, tomatoes, lettuce, cucumber, fried fish, dressing, onion, onion rings

List 4: water, rock, juice, concrete, brick, soda, cement, oil, pavement

Exercise 5: Outlining from Listening (a.k.a. “Note Taking”)

There are usually two steps in outlining from listening: record the information as best you can first and then organize it later. This depends on the speaker. Usually, teachers’ presentations are already organized for you and you only need to translate what you hear into your own words.

The next exercises will be note taking tasks. You will hear short lessons and will take notes, then if necessary organize into an outline separately.

The next note taking format I have encountered is called “Cornell Notes”. In this method, the page is divided into two columns, one wide and one narrow. In the larger column, usually to the left, you take notes on the lesson. Later (or during the lesson if time), you compose questions on the notes you took. When you go to study later, you drill the questions.

How can outlines be graded?

The best outlines conform to these characteristics:

- “Rational; Fully Conforms to author’s presentation” – This means you have organized it logically and it follows the general format of the author. Note: When outlining from listening, you may need to reorganize more if the speaker is not really organized!
- “No omissions, irrelevancies or inaccuracies” – This does not mean you have to include every detail. It means you selected the best details to keep.
- “In student’s own words— meaning preserved” – Do not copy word-for-word from text for this task.
- “Uses as few words as possible without losing meaning” – fewer words means easier to study!

Works Cited

King, Wayne E. and Napp, John L. United States History. Circle Pines, Minnesota: AGS Publishing, 2005.

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