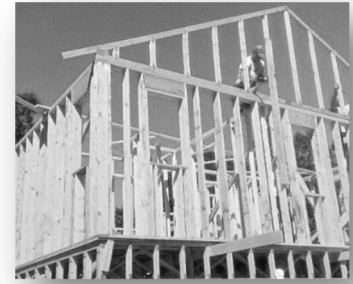


# Research Paper 101 Series

## Step Five: Developing an Outline

If a thesis statement is to a research paper as a rudder is to a ship, then an outline is to a research paper as a frame is to a house. A frame gives a house its structure. In the same way, an outline provides structure to a paper. Your outline is not independent of your thesis statement. A good outline is designed to *support* the central claim or argument that you have made.



If you build your frame solidly, the house will be well supported.  
If you effectively develop an outline, your research paper will be well argued.

### 1. Review your thesis statement

Go back to your thesis statement and circle or highlight key words. This may seem redundant, but we must keep our thesis at the forefront.

Analytical Thesis Statement	Argumentative Thesis Statement
Polish hero <b>Witold Pilecki's</b> <b>daring efforts</b> provided <b>valuable intelligence</b> to the <b>Allied Resistance</b> during <b>World War II</b> .	The <b>disembodied brains</b> in both <b>Madeleine L'Engle's <i>A Wrinkle in Time</i></b> and <b>C.S. Lewis's <i>That Hideous Strength</i></b> expose the <b>danger of elevating reason</b> to the extent that it is <b>divorced from the spiritual</b> .

In our example thesis statements, subjects are highlighted in yellow, claim/focus/theme/idea in green, and the setting in pink.

### 2. Identify recurring themes, concepts, arguments, issues, etc. that pertain to your thesis

It's time to mine your notes. Having done your research, you already have an idea of what themes, concepts, arguments, etc. you have come across consistently. It's time to mark these in your notes.

Depending on your preference you can do this in a few different ways:

- Use different colour highlighters to mark themes. You can highlight the first word or the whole note.
- In One Note, tag all your notes that pertain to a particular theme.
- Rewrite/type/copy & paste your notes by theme.
- Create a concept map with your notes (great for visual learners). Check out Scapple, Mindomo, Bubbl.us, or Mindmanager among others.

### 3. Look for general categories

You may have subconsciously been doing this as you highlighted/marked your notes. However, in considering your themes/ideas/facts, are there broader categories that emerge? In other words, do some of your colours or tags naturally relate to one another?

- Look for relationships between items.
- Identify repetition—can any areas be collapsed or eliminated?

- If you were to file your information away, how would you label it?

Let's go back to our example of Witold Pilecki's daring efforts during War II.



**Here are my tags in One Note:** Family, Early Life, Military Background, German Invasion, Polish Resistance 1, Reasons for going to Auschwitz, Life in Auschwitz, Escape from Auschwitz, Report disbelieved, Polish Resistance 2, German POW, Italy, Soviet Poland, Trial and Execution.

My tags could be sorted into more general categories:

Background Information—formation	Auschwitz	Continuing efforts	The final chapter—return home
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Family</li> <li>▪ Early Life</li> <li>▪ Military Background</li> <li>▪ German Invasion</li> <li>▪ Polish Resistance I</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reasons for going to Auschwitz</li> <li>▪ Life in Auschwitz</li> <li>▪ Escape from Auschwitz</li> <li>▪ Report Disbelieved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Polish Resistance 2</li> <li>▪ German POW</li> <li>▪ Italy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Soviet Poland</li> <li>▪ Trial and Execution</li> </ul>

*Be aware of the tendency to condense (or expand) to a three-point essay. College writing does not require you to have nor limit you to three points.*

#### 4. Determine the order of your points

Look through your general categories. How will you most effectively arrange your information to make the clearest and most effective case?

- Will you save your strongest point for last?
- Does one point naturally lead to the next?
- Is there a time element to your points that lends to chronological organization?
- Which points will most likely draw your audience in and would better placed earlier in the paper?
- Is there a theme that you can weave through your paper?

Returning to our example, a research paper on Witold Pilecki lends well to a chronological arrangement. However, the themes of courage and sacrifice should be highlighted.

#### 5. Create your working outline

Use the following format to create a formal outline.

Thesis	Polish hero Witold Pilecki's daring efforts provided valuable intelligence to the Allied Resistance during World War II.
I. Major Idea	I. Formation of a hero
A. Supporting Idea	A. Family and early life
B. Supporting Idea	B. Military background and training
II. Major Idea	C. German invasion of Poland
A. Supporting Idea	D. Early work with the Polish resistance
B. Supporting Idea	II. Time in Auschwitz
III. Major Idea	
IV. Major Idea	

. Note: You must use parallel construction in wording your outline.

**Your outline will guide your writing process, making the rough draft much easier to write.**

*Next up... Writing your Rough Draft*