

# OUTLINING A PAPER BASED ON A PROMPT

After you've [broken down the prompt and written your thesis](#), your next step is to outline your paper. Using an outline will give your paper a cohesive structure, which will help enhance your paper's flow and readability.

Your most important guide for writing the paper is your professor's prompt. Focusing on the prompt will allow you to keep your paper on-topic and help it cover all the ground that it needs to.

## Strategies

- **Consider the Professor's Specific Requirements.**
  - Ensure you respond directly to each and every part of the professor's prompt in your paper: as you plan, list all the requirements of the prompt and consider how best to implement them into your paper.
- **Consider what sorts of paragraphs/sections you will need to respond to the prompt.**
  - Keep your organization straightforward so that your professor can easily find each element of their prompt in your work. In some cases, your professor will note the sections you should use. Otherwise, construct your sections to answer each part of the professor's prompt.
  - Mirror the construction of your thesis in your body paragraphs. A good thesis statement will state the main argument or claim, as well as the topic of each section in your paper. Therefore, a good thesis will guide the rest of your paper. Review Thesis Statements [Part One](#) and [Part Two](#) as desired.
- **Take the word count of the paper into consideration.**
  - The assignment's word count is a reflection of how in-depth your professor wants it to be. Adjust the length and depth of your sections accordingly as you plan.
  - In general, try to make the sections about equal to each other, with the introduction and conclusions alone being shorter.
  - Consider what the assignment prompt is asking for – what the professor really wants to know – and make those sections longer so that you can deliver more in-depth answers.
- **Pick an organizational style based on the type of paper.**
  - While some assignments, such as discussion board posts, may not use a traditional structure, most longer papers will require one. For help with outlining or deciding what structure is best for your paper, see our resources on [Academic Summaries](#), [Assignment Prompts](#), [Five-Paragraph Essays](#), [Narrative Papers](#), and [Research Papers](#).

- **Start writing.**
  - For most general papers, start with an introductory paragraph. Focus on telling readers any background information, history, or definitions they need to know about the topic before focusing on your thesis statement.\*
  - After that, follow your outline to guide you through writing the rest of your paper.
  - After you finish the rough draft, revisit the introduction to ensure it corresponds well with your paper, also making sure that the entire paper answered the original prompt.

\*For some shorter or specialized papers, you might not need an introduction. Additionally, some types of papers wouldn't use traditional introduction paragraphs, such as research papers that require an abstract. See our resource on Abstracts vs. Introductions for more information.

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