

Outlining a Textbook

Outlining an expository textbook: (from <http://classroom.synonym.com>)

★Do yourself a favor and watch this tutorial: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVrsIRCDZSQ>

Outlining a textbook chapter is not just copying down the first sentence of every paragraph or every heading headings. A good outline demonstrates understanding of the material and an ability to identify and summarize its main points. If you are outlining for a class assignment, follow any assignment instructions first; some teachers prefer outlines with sentences, while others want outlines with keywords and topics only. If you are outlining for yourself, follow whatever style best fits the purpose of the outline.

Step 1

Skim the textbook chapter for a few minutes, looking at the headings and any bold or italic words. Having a basic idea of the chapter content and keywords will help you follow the structure of the chapter better and prepare you for outlining.

Step 2

Read the chapter. Don't start writing your outline yet, but feel free to write down any particularly interesting points or page numbers as you go.

Step 3

Begin your outline. Many textbook chapters have introductory paragraphs that give a good outline for the chapter. For example, in a history textbook, a chapter introduction may say it will discuss the lead up to the Vietnam War, the war itself and the aftermath. For the Vietnam War chapter, you might choose three main headings: Before the War, During the War and After the War.

Step 4

Adhere to the outline format. Outlines typically have several different levels; one of the most common formats has heading titles preceded by I, II, III. Subheadings begin with capital letter headings, followed by Arabic numeral headings (1, 2, 3), followed by lowercase Roman numeral headings (i, ii, iii). Label each level of heading and content with both a number or letter and a title, key word, or sentence, and indent each successive level of headings more than the previous level. Use the structure your instructor prefers, if given.

Step 5

Search for the main ideas and subjects as you re-read the chapter and write your outline. Under each main heading, add subheadings that elaborate on the subject, giving additional facts and details. For World War II, you might have subheadings with key facts about the effects of the military draft on American society and significant events such as the bombing of Japan. Ideas that are part of a main idea should be **indented** and labeled as a subheading of that idea.

Step 6

Skim the chapter once more when you have finished re-reading the chapter and constructing your outline to check that you have not missed any important information.