

Creating Outlines

The same features that make a word processing program a good note file can also help you in outlining a paper.

You can construct an outline on your word processor and then move the various parts around easily to achieve a more effective organization.

As you work, you can gradually fill in your outline, using sample sentences and paragraphs that you can later fit into your paper. You can try out introductions and conclusions to see which of them best express your purposes.

If you have consulted several sources, you can often put your paper together by transferring notes from your note file to the place where you think they ought to fit in your outline. You can try different arrangements and experiment with different organizations.

You can save the various versions of your expanded outlines, print them out, and compare them to see which seems to suit your purposes best.

Some word processing programs now have built-in outlining functions, and some outlining programs with special functions are on the market. These outliners allow you to put your final paper together easily from an extended outline merely by pressing a few function keys. But by using the search and copy functions of any program, you can use it as an outliner.

If you use the computer to outline and to arrange your notes in organized blocks, you will see more clearly that writing is seldom a linear process in which one sits down and starts writing a paper from the beginning and goes straight through to the end. Writing is nearly always a process by which we bring chunks of material together and then blend them into a whole.