

Public Speaking: How to Outline

Arrangement

An outline, whether sentence or topic, is divided into points and subpoints. Subpoints always go under the main points of which they are a part and which they support. See the example to the right →

- I. Kinds of apples
 - A. Jonathan
 - B. Granny Smith
 - C. Macintosh

Structure can also be used to show logical or time progressions, as in this example:

- I. Low pay discourages potential recruits.
- II. The status quo offers low pay.
- III. The status quo discourages recruits.

Divisions in any series should be of equal importance. That is, the points numbered I, II, III, IV, etc., should be the main points; divisions lettered with capitals should be subdivisions the main points. For example:

Improperly Divided

- I. The executive branch
- II. The President
- III. The Cabinet
- IV. The legislative branch
- V. The House
- VI. The Senate
- VII. The judicial branch
- VIII. The Supreme Court
- IX. The lower courts

Properly Divided

- I. The executive branch
 - A. The President
 - B. The Cabinet
- II. The legislative branch
 - A. The House
 - B. The Senate
- III. The judicial branch
 - A. The Supreme Court
 - B. The lower courts

Coordination

Points of equal importance should be coordinated—that is, given an equal and parallel ranking. It would be illogical to outline our national defenses as →

- I. The armed services
 - A. The Army
 - B. The Navy
 - C. The Marines
 - D. The Air Force

← Instead, the four divisions, being of equal importance, should be parallel, as seen to the left.

- I. The armed services
 - A. The Army
 - B. The Navy
 - C. The Marines
- II. The Air Force

Overlapping

Parallel points in an outline should not overlap as in the top example. → The second example (American *and then* Foreign) would be better:

- I. American automobiles
- II. Ford

- I. American automobiles
 - A. Ford
 - B. Chevrolet
- II. Foreign automobiles

Single Subpoint

Do not use single subpoints in an outline. When you divide anything, you always have at least two parts. **Thus, if you have an “A.”, you should have a “B.”; any “1.” should be followed by a “2.”** If you think that you have only one subtopic, include it in the topic above. This top example is incorrect, whereas the second one is correct:

- I. Large, sparsely populated states are hard for salesmen to cover.
 - A. Montana is one of these states.

- I. Large, sparsely populated states like Montana are hard for salesmen to cover.

Be clear and concise

Make labels for main points concise and clear (brief and to the point). Remember, the whole point of using structure is to make a speech easy for an audience to understand.

