

# Gale Resources Tip Sheet

## Gale In Context Toolbox—How to Make an Outline

The *Gale In Context* toolbox tip sheets are designed to help middle school and high school researchers prepare a written report. This document will explain how to **create an outline** as a guide to your report.

The outline is the skeleton of a good piece of writing. The outline supplies the structural foundation for a well-written report, much like your bones supply the structural foundation for your body. Just like your bones, your paper's outline should be:

- **Complete** enough to cover your topic from head to toe.
- **Ordered** to ensure that each part is properly connected to its neighbor parts.
- **Coordinated** to maintain balance and consistency.
- **Interconnected** so that all parts work together in a unified whole.
- **Flexible** enough to allow for growth and development.

### Cover Your Topic Completely

Before you can write an outline, you have to know your topic inside and out, top to bottom, backward and forward. Test yourself by making a list of important facts and details about your topic. Jot down everything about the topic you can think of. If you can make a complete, thorough list, you're ready to start your outline. If you can't, do some more research. As you do your research, add new facts and details to your list.

Your list should include everything you know that's important about your topic. For example, say you're writing a report about global warming. Here's a list you might create:

- Climate scientists report evidence of rising temperatures worldwide.
- Reforestation could reduce carbon dioxide levels.
- Some energy sources don't produce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Might cause flooding if polar ice caps melt.
- Kyoto Protocol—international treaty that would limit greenhouse gas emissions.
- Might cause deserts to expand and croplands to dry up.
- Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased 25% in the past 200 years.
- Projected global temperature increase: 3–8 degrees Fahrenheit in 50 years.
- Hotter weather and an increase in natural disasters in the 1990s could be signs of lasting climate change.
- Atmospheric carbon dioxide traps heat like a greenhouse.
- Controversial—most scientists accept the theory, but some don't.
- Might cause sea levels to rise—salt water could intrude into fresh water supplies.
- Burning fossil fuels, aka greenhouse gases, can increase carbon dioxide.
- Many countries haven't ratified the Kyoto Protocol and might not abide by it.
- Other greenhouse gases (chlorofluorocarbons, nitrous oxide, methane) contribute to global warming.
- Energy conservation could reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

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### Get Your Thoughts in Order

The information in an outline needs to be arranged in order. One way to put information in order is to classify it in groups. Then all you have to do is arrange the groups in a logical sequence and everything will be in order.

Take a fresh look at our list of global warming facts and details. Here's how we might put them in order:

#### Group 1: Observations that gave rise to the global warming theory

- Climate scientists report evidence of rising temperatures worldwide.
- Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased 25% in the past 200 years.
- Projected global temperature increase: 3–8 degrees Fahrenheit in 50 years.

#### Group 2: The global warming theory

- Burning fossil fuels, aka greenhouse gases, can increase carbon dioxide.
- Atmospheric carbon dioxide traps heat like a greenhouse.
- Other greenhouse gases (chlorofluorocarbons, nitrous oxide, methane) contribute to global warming.
- Controversial—most scientists accept the theory, but some don't.

#### Group 3: Possible effects, if the theory is true

- Hotter weather and an increase in natural disasters in the 1990s could be signs of lasting climate change.
- Might cause sea levels to rise—salt water could intrude into fresh water supplies.
- Might cause flooding if polar ice caps melt.
- Might cause deserts to expand and croplands to dry up.

#### Group 4: Possible solutions and future concerns

- Energy conservation could reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Reforestation could reduce carbon dioxide levels.
- Some energy sources don't produce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Kyoto Protocol—international treaty that would limit greenhouse gas emissions.
- Many countries haven't ratified the Kyoto Protocol and might not abide by it.

### Get Coordinated

Classifying information into groups is a key feature of outlines. Outlines typically have many levels of groups. The top level has the main headings. Below the main headings lies another level, the subheadings. Nearly all outlines have another level under the subheadings for facts and details about the various subheadings. Sometimes an outline can have six or more levels.

The main thing to remember about levels is that they're coordinated. Every level should contain roughly equivalent information. This means that the top-level main headings should be names for large categories of information. The second-level subheadings should be names for smaller categories of information that fit under the larger categories of information. Third-level terms are facts and details that fit under the smaller categories of information.

Here's how our global warming outline might look:

- I. Level 1
  - A. Level 2
    - i. Level 3
      - 1. Level 4

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- I. Introduction
- II. Body
  - A. Background Observations
    - i. Global temperatures are rising
    - ii. Atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO<sup>2</sup>) is increasing
    - iii. Temperatures are projected to rise 3°–8°F by 2050
  - B. Global Warming Theory
    - i. Burning fossil fuels increases atmospheric CO<sup>2</sup>
    - ii. Atmospheric CO<sup>2</sup> traps heat like a greenhouse
    - iii. Other greenhouse gases trap heat
      1. Chlorofluorocarbons
      2. Nitrous oxide
      3. Methane
    - iv. Most scientists accept the theory; some don't
  - C. Possible Global Warming Effects
    - i. Ice caps melt
    - ii. Sea levels rise
      1. Salt water intrusion
      2. Flooding
    - iii. Deserts expand
      1. Croplands dry up
      2. Erosion accelerates
  - D. Ways to Curtail Global Warming
    - i. Conserve energy
    - ii. Switch to renewable energy sources
      1. Solar
      2. Geothermal
    - iii. Plant trees to rebuild forests
    - iv. Reduce emissions by treaty
      1. Kyoto Protocol
      2. Ratification
- III. Conclusion

Get the idea? Every level has the same kind of information. Higher levels have broad, general categories of information. Lower levels have specific factual details that are subordinate to their higher level headings.

### Get Connected

In a well-written outline, everything fits together to support your main points. Once you've made the first draft of an outline, always read it over and make sure that your lower level details support your higher level points. If you feel you need more details to support your higher level points, do some more research and dig up useful facts!

Make sure you've ordered everything the way you plan to write about it in your paper. If you think a different order would get your point across better, now's the time to make the change.

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### Stay Flexible

When your outline is finished, you're ready to start writing your report. Once you've begun writing, sometimes you run across new information you didn't cover in your outline. Other times you realize you left something out of the outline that needs to be in the report. If you've done a good job structuring your outline, it'll be flexible enough to let you make changes after you've started writing your report. Feel free to change your outline, as long as the change makes your report more complete. The end result will be a better report!

You can download a worksheet to help create your outline here:

[https://support.gale.com/doc/createoutline\\_ws](https://support.gale.com/doc/createoutline_ws)

**Need more help? Ask your librarian!**