Creating an Outline

Organize your ideas to improve the coherence of your writing

An outline is like the lines in a coloring book – once you have a well-organized outline, ‘coloring in’ becomes a piece of cake. Outlines are especially important and helpful when you are writing a long essay or composition.

Nine steps to making an outline:

1. Read the prompt and make sure you understand it; look up words you don’t know
2. Underline key words, requirements, and important information in the prompt
3. Read relevant literature and brainstorm to come up with a solid main idea for your essay
4. Make sure your main idea matches up with the requirements in the prompt
5. List the major points of support for your main idea (and background information where appropriate)
6. For each point of support, list details and evidence to use when writing about that point
7. Make sure that all of your points of support are appropriate and match up with your main idea and with the requirements of the prompt
8. Use your main idea and major points of support to formulate a thesis statement (a clear, concise statement of your main argument or discussion. Your thesis will also serve as a roadmap for the rest of your essay, giving the reader a general idea of the path your argument or discussion will follow.)
9. Write your paper, paying close attention to (and following) your outline