

# Composition

# Storyboard

A file informally laying out your planned argument, adding in more elements and detail as you go along.

# Outline

A structured tree representation of your argument

- ▶ **Topic outline:** Each entry is a descriptive phrase of the content of a paragraph or section. **Discouraged** because you don't need to have a reasoned argument to produce an itemized list of relevant issues.
- ▶ **Sentence outline:** Each entry is a claim, supporting argument, or identification of supporting evidence. Roughly, a sentence outline is a structured index of **topic sentences**. **Encouraged** because a sentence outline affords a detailed representation of your argument and does not tolerate digressions.

(Cf. *MLA Handbook*, §1.8; Turabian, §6.2.1)

# The Paragraph

## Topic sentence

The sentence that asserts the point being made in its paragraph. It is good practice to lead with the topic sentence so readers are not left in the dark as to where you are headed.

## Thesis statement

The sentence that states the argument being made in the essay, effectively the introduction's topic sentence. It is good practice to close your introduction with the thesis statement so you can provide context before revealing your position. You may use multiple paragraphs for your introduction and leave the thesis statement until the end.

**NB:** do not write “this paper/paragraph argues that parrots make for bad pets”; write simply “parrots make for bad pets,” and ensure structured support for your position in the paragraph body. In the thesis statement, include a concise summary of your line of reasoning.

# Sentence Outline: Schema

## Thesis statement

- I. First claim
  - A. First supporting argument
  - B. Second supporting argument
    - 1. First concrete evidence (e.g. quotation from source)
    - 2. Second concrete evidence
- II. Second claim
  - A. First supporting argument
  - B. ...
- III. Conclusion

## Sentence Outline: Example (1/3)

Thesis statement: The wet landscape inhabited by monsters in *Beowulf* has explanations both in their Cainite ancestry and in folktale tradition.

- I. Landscape is part of the monsters' identities.
  - A. Grendel is frequently seen to travel to and from water landscapes.
    1. Quotation...
  - B. His mother has water epithets.
    1. Quotation...
- II. Previous scholars have pointed out a connection between wet landscape and Cainite ancestry.
  - A. Williams implies marine survival but then returns to the Chad narrative.
  - B. Mellinkoff points to a rabbinic tradition concerning marine survival.

## Sentence Outline: Example (2/3)

- III. Marine survival of Cain's progeny may explain the water element in *Beowulf*.
  - A. Marine life is arguably exempt from the flood throughout Genesis.
  - B. Augustine confirms this.
    - 1. Quotation...
  - C. *Beowulf* seems to rely on the same understanding of the flood.
- IV. Not all environmental features in the poem may be explained through theological interpretation; in these cases, folktale conventions should be considered.
  - A. The monsters are defined by night and darkness; these are common theological images, but are here better explained in terms of folktale convention.

## Sentence Outline: Example (3/3)

- V. The same goes for the damp-landscape motif.
  - A. Alaric Hall has shown a specific landscape mapping existed for supernatural creatures, following which all landscape categories may be charted along the axes of economic value and perceived danger. Following the same, marshes have especially strong supernatural connotations.
    1. Maxims II
    2. Hrothgar's warning
    3. Bertold of Regensburg
- VI. Conclusion: The monstrous landscape of *Beowulf* has roots in at least the two traditions of biblical theology and folktale tradition.



## Exercise: Sentence Outline

Write an outline for one of the following thesis statements:

- ▶ Bike helmets should be mandatory
- ▶ Bike helmets should not be mandatory

(Make up evidence.)

Cf. [howiechong.com/journal/2014/2/bike-helmets](http://howiechong.com/journal/2014/2/bike-helmets)

## Some Pitfalls

- ▶ Plagiarism
  - ▶ Cite your sources also when paraphrasing!
- ▶ Excessive reliance on secondary sources (Turabian, §6.1.2)
- ▶ Renarration
- ▶ Digression
- ▶ Narrative of discovery (Turabian, §6.1.1)

The element most critical to assessment is your own argumentation!

## Bibliography

*MLA Handbook*. 8th ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2016.

Turabian, Kate L. *Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 9th ed. Revised by Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, William T. Fitzgerald, and University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.



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