

TOPIC OUTLINING FOR AN ESSAY

Even if you are the type that prefers to jump right in without planning, you should know how to write a topic outline. Read the essay below. Then look at the topic outline which follows.

Peer Pressure

We often hear about the dangers of peer pressure to teenagers. Teenagers take drugs, skip school, get drunk, or have sex because their friends do these things. However, there is another—perhaps equally bad—effect of peer pressure. Desperate to conform to their friends' values, teens may give up their interests in school, in hobbies, and even in certain people.

Teenagers may, first of all, lose or hide their interest in school in order to be like their friends. They adopt a negative attitude in which school is seen as a battlefield, with teachers and other officials regarded as the enemy. In addition, teenagers may stop participating in class. It is no longer cool to raise a hand or seem anxious to learn. It is cool to show up without the assigned homework. Conforming also means not joining many after-school activities. A teenager might be curious about the band, the Spanish club, the student council, or the computer club but does not dare join if the gang feels such activities are for squares.

Teenagers also give up private pleasures and hobbies to be one of the crowd. Certain pastimes, such as writing poems, practicing piano, reading books, or fooling around with a chemistry set may be off-limits because the crowd laughs at them. So, teens often drop these interests or exchange them for riding around in cars and hanging out at the mall. Even worse, teens have to give up their own values and mock the people who stay interested in such hobbies. Against their better instincts, they label as "creeps" the girl who is always reading books or the boy who spends after-school time in the biology lab. Most important, giving up private pleasure during these years can mean that the teenager loses these interests forever. It may only be as an adult that the person wishes he or she had kept up with piano, ballet, or astronomy—and feels it is now too late to start again.

Finally, teenagers sometimes give up the people they love in order to be accepted. If necessary, they sacrifice the old friend who no longer dresses well enough, listens to the right kind of music, or refuses to drink or take drugs. Potential boyfriends and girlfriends may be rejected, too, if the crowd doesn't like their looks or values. Sadly, teenagers can even cut their families out of their lives. They may be ashamed of the parents who are too poor, too conventional, too different from friends' parents. Even if the teens are not completely ashamed of their parents, they may still refuse to participate in family get-togethers or spend time with younger brothers or sisters.

It is true that many teenagers face the pressures of being forced to take drugs, to perform dangerous stunts, to do risky things. But a more common and perhaps more painful pressure is to conform to the crowd by giving up part of oneself. Attachments to learning, to special interests, and to special people are often thrown away must to "be one of the guys."

TOPIC OUTLINE OF PEER PRESSURE ESSAY

Thesis statement with blueprint: Desperate to conform to their friends' values, teens may **give up their interests in school, in hobbies, and even in certain people.**

I Teenagers may lose or hide their interest in school to be like their friends.

- A. Adopt negative attitude
- B. Stop participating in class
- C. Not join after-school activities

II. Teenagers also give up private pleasures and hobbies to be one of the crowd.

- A. Give up certain pastimes
- B. Ridicule others
- C. Lose interest in these hobbies forever

III. Teenagers sometimes give up the people they love in order to be accepted.

- A. Old friends
- B. Potential boyfriends and girlfriends
- C. Families

Notice that each of the three parts of your blueprint becomes a roman numeral (I, II, or III). These roman numerals will each become a topic sentence. Don't worry about an intro and conclusion when you prepare a topic outline; just concentrate on blocking out your central paragraphs.

Guidelines:

1. Do not make single subdivisions--you must have at least two subdivisions. If there is a I, there must be (at least) a II. You would never say, "I dislike you--one, because you are cheap." Your audience will be waiting for the second point; otherwise you wouldn't say "one", or "first...". Saying "One" implies a "Two" at least.
2. Use parallel grammatical forms for headings of equal importance: If I reads "Assembling the ingredients, then II should read, "Mixing the ingredients", not "Mix the ingredients" or "You should mix the ingredients".
3. Be sure that your divisions do not overlap and that you stick to one principle of division. You should not, for example, discuss books in terms of "fiction", "non-fiction", and "novels", because novels are logically a subdivision of fiction. Instead, say
 - I. Fiction
 - A. Novels
 - B. Short stories
 - II. Non-fiction
 - A. Biography
 - B. History
 - C. Self-help

4. Be sure that your headings and sub-headings show proper logical relationship. In discussing athletes, you should not establish Wayne Gretzky as one major division and Hockey players as a second. Instead, you might establish Great Goal-scorers as one major heading (with Wayne Gretzky and Guy Lafleur as A and B), followed by Great Goalies (with say, Patrick Roy and Jacques Plante as A and B).

Exercise 1.

Point out what is wrong with the parts of the following topic outline:

Thesis: All my profs make me think

- I. My English prof
 - A. Challenges logic of papers
 - B. Assigns complex essay topics
 - C. Wears pretty clothes

- II. My history prof
 - A. Gives detailed lectures

- III. My music prof
 - A. Speaks three languages
 - B. Has great sense of humour

Exercise 2

Under the thesis statement that follows is a scrambled list of primary (roman numeral) and secondary (Capital letters) supporting ideas. Put the ideas into logical order by preparing a topic outline for each of the two topic sentences.

Thesis: In today's world, people try to avoid silence as much as possible.

On vacation

TV as background noise

At school

Muzak playing in cafeteria

Stereos and radios on non-stop

Noisy toys such as snowmobiles and dirt bikes

At home

Noisy places such as crowded beaches and amusement parks

TV soap operas blaring in lounges and pubs

Answer to scrambled outlining activity

I. At home

- A. TV on as background noise
- B. Stereos and radios on nonstop

II. At school

- A. Muzak playing in cafeteria
- B. TV soap operas on in lounges

III. On vacation

- A. Noisy "toys" such as snowmobiles and dirt bikes
 - C. Noisy places such as crowded beaches and amusement parks
 - D.

OUTLINING AN ESSAY I

Read the essay below. Then outline it on a separate sheet of paper. Write out the thesis statement and topic sentences and list the three major points that fit under each topic sentence.

Escape Reading

Everyone needs to escape from a dull routine. Escape can sometimes be dangerous--if a person turns to alcohol or drugs, for instance. But escaping into a sport or hobby can be a healthy way to turn off the daily pressures. My escape hatch is reading books that carry me to other times and places.

I often escape, first of all, into spy stories. These books are usually set in exotic lands I'm sure I will never actually see. Spies, for example, pass information to each other in a market in Tokyo, a cafe in Venice, or an airport in Bombay. In addition, spy novels are filled with fascinating marvels of technology. James Bond has his Lotus car equipped with smokescreen and machine gun controls, of course, but even less-glamorous spies use cameras the size of matchboxes and microphones that pick up conversations miles away. The intricate, twisted plots of spy stories also aid the sensation of total escape. Keeping up with the secret agents, the counterspies, and the double crosses occupies my mind completely. I don't worry about whether my car will pass inspection when I'm trying to figure out which American agent is really working for the KGB.

A second kind of escape reading I enjoy is the Western. A book by Zane Grey or Louis L'Amour is filled with the atmosphere of a long-ago era. I can live for a time in a town like Dodge City; I can almost see the dusty main street, the raised wooden sidewalks, and the women wearing calico sunbonnets. The Western also helps me escape by providing plenty of action. Almost every page puts me in the midst of a cattle roundup, a gunfight, or a galloping posse. The non-stop action won't allow my mind to wander back to the real world until I turn the last page. Finally, a Western tempts me to escape into it because the story usually describes a simpler, less confusing world than my own. The characters are either good guys or bad buys, and it is easy to tell the difference. In the Old West, justice always triumphs in the end.

The final and most enjoyable escape I know is reading horror stories. For one thing, such stories keep me interested because the authors create fascinating imaginary monsters. A story about a slimy creature that

emerges from a graveyard or a huge, hundred-pound rat that lives in a basement is a story that blanks out reality. Horror stories introduce me to imaginary places as well. A horror tale can be set in a series of tunnels beneath the Antarctic ice sheet or in another dimension that exists only in a spooky old house. Pure shock, however, is what makes horror stories sure-fire escapes. The problems I have at work could never be as bad, for example, as the horrible situations Stephen King's characters endure. As I read about a woman being chased by a rabid St. Bernard, or a little boy being pursued by an insane and murderous father, I forget the outside world completely.

The members of my family have learned to leave me in peace when I escape into my books. They know that giving me such time means that I will be easier to live with. After I have returned from a dangerous spy mission, a Western shoot-out, or a house of horror, I can deal more calmly with everyday crises at home.

OUTLINING AN ESSAY II

Read the essay below. Then outline it on a separate sheet of paper. Write out the thesis statement and topic sentences and list the three major points that fit under each topic sentence.

Problems with Holidays

When most of us think about holidays, we have images of togetherness, happiness, and freedom from everyday cares. However, these pleasant pre-holiday thoughts can often turn into an unpleasant reality. The problems connected with holidays tend to occur in three areas--family situations, personal expectations, and finances.

Families can make holidays very trying times. First, for larger holidays such as Christmas, many families gather all the relatives in one place. Living with relatives, even temporarily, can be annoying. You discover, for instance, that Uncle Bob spends two hours in the bathroom every morning, and Aunt Helen performs dozens of noisy jumping jacks on the wooden floors of the upstairs bedroom. Besides the problems of close confinement, family get-togethers can also result in arguments and conflicts. Old wounds are opened and new ones inflicted. Aunt Helen will have one drink too many and remind your father that no one in their family thought Mom was good enough for him. Mom's simmering dislike of Aunt Helen flares up, the entire family takes sides, children start crying, and the grudges are carried long past the holiday season.

A second area of holiday trouble revolves around personal expectations. One expectation that can end in disappointment is the dream of a perfect gift. Your boyfriend shows up on Valentine's Day with a card, not a dozen roses; a shirt is sitting under the Christmas tree, not the stereo system you wanted. Another false expectation is that something important will happen. For instance, the hope that this Thanksgiving will finally be the one that brings you and your father closer together vanishes as the day turns into the usual round of eating and watching football, rather than talking in an intimate way. A last false belief is that the holiday will lessen loneliness and depression. But, in fact, holidays may do just the opposite. You will probably feel especially miserable if you have no special someone and there are couples all around you at the Easter or Christmas church service.

Finances are the final area of holiday difficulty. Employees may be asked to contribute to holiday charity drives, the boss' present, the secretary's gift, or the maintenance people's envelopes. Also, acting as the host for a holiday can be expensive. Having a pre-holiday party or a big family dinner on the day itself can cost well over a hundred dollars. The biggest financial pressure, though, is buying gifts for the family. You are under pressure to buy the Barbie Dream House, video games, or a fancy watch. If you don't buy the present a person wants, you feel like a guilty Scrooge; if you do buy it, you live in dread of January bills.

Whether the reasons are family situations, personal expectations, or financial considerations, holidays are often not the fulfilling experiences they are supposed to be. They can, in fact, be nervewracking.

OUTLINING AN ESSAY I

Thesis Statement: My escape hatch is reading books that carry me to other times and places.

Topic Sentence _I: I often escape., first of all, into spy stories. Specific Supporting Evidence: A. Set in exotic lands B. Fascinating technology C. Intricate plots

Topic Sentence _II: A second kind of escape reading I enjoy is the Western. Specific Supporting Evidence: A. Atmosphere of long-ago era B. Plenty of action C. Simpler, less-confusing world

Topic Sentence III: The final and most enjoyable escape I know is reading horror stories. Specific Supporting Evidence: A. Fascinating monsters B: Imaginary places C. Pure shock

OUTLINING AN ESSAY II

Thesis Statement: The problems connected with holidays tend to occur in three areas--family situations, personal expectations, and finances.

Topic Sentence _I: Families can make holidays very trying times. Specific Supporting Evidence: A. Family in close quarters B. Arguments and conflicts

Topic Sentence _II: A second area of holiday trouble revolves around personal expectations. Specific Supporting Evidence: A. Dream of perfect gift B. Something important will happen C. Holiday will lessen loneliness and depression

Topic Sentence _III: Finances are the final area of holiday difficulty. Specific Supporting Evidence: A. Office expenses B. Expenses as host C. Buying family gifts