

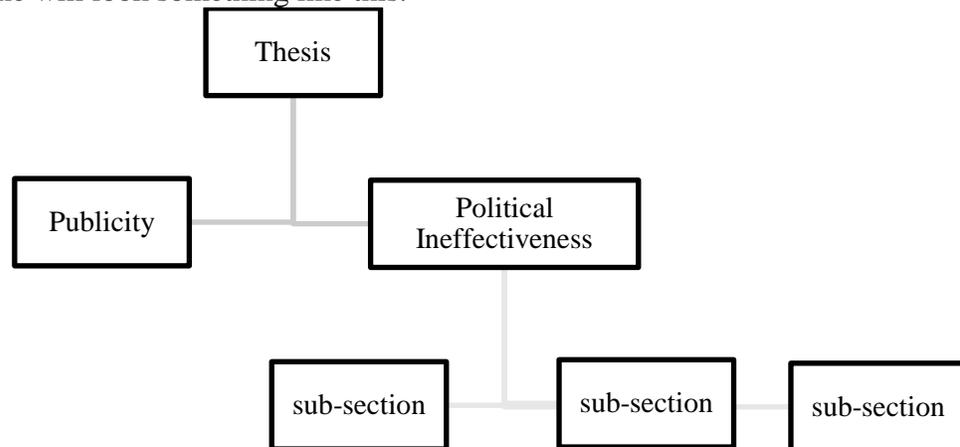
## Making an Informal Outline

Once you have decided on a preliminary thesis, you are ready to make an informal outline—a plan you can follow in structuring the body of your paper. You could begin writing without such a plan, but this method is often ineffective. There are simply too many alternatives available to the writer who plunges in at random. An informal outline can help you make the choices that give your paper direction. When making an informal outline, remember that the body of your paper has value only in so far as it supports or explains the paper's thesis. If your thesis seems inadequate or unsupported, change it, but do not attempt to make an outline until you have at least a preliminary thesis in mind.

A well-written thesis will generally give you a sense of what comes next. For example, given the thesis, “Despite the publicity given terrorists, terrorism itself is politically ineffective,” we know that the paper will have two major sections.

- One section will support the idea in the subordinate clause—the idea that publicity is given to terrorists.
- The other section will deal with the claim made in the main clause—the assertion that terrorism is counterproductive.

Your informal outline will look something like this:

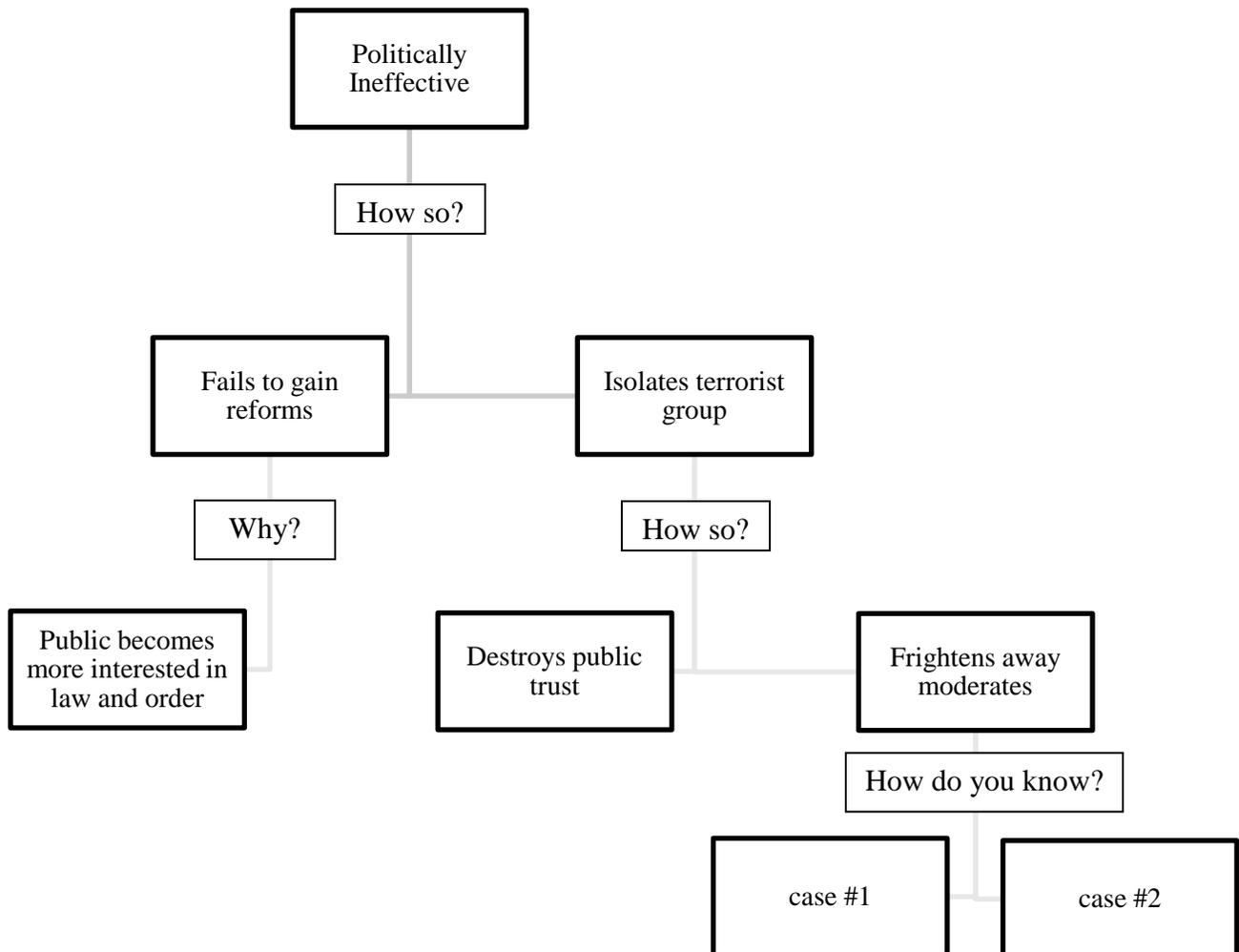


The section governed by the main clause is the more important of the two. Therefore, it will have a greater number of sub-sections. It should also come last so your reader will focus on this section. So far your outline doesn't have much detail, but you've made an important beginning. If your thesis doesn't provide you with at least this much of a picture, go back to it—it probably needs sharpening.

Filling in the sub-sections is not too difficult if you use your imagination. Try to change places with your reader. Don't worry so much about explaining what you mean, but think instead about what your reader needs to know. In other words, what evidence would you need to be convinced of the assertion made in your thesis? Ask yourself some of the questions an intelligent reader might ask. You may not anticipate them all, but you know they will fall into certain categories. Here are some useful questions:

<u>Question</u>	<u>Information asked for</u>
What do you mean?	Define your terms. Make vague phrases more specific.
How so?	Elaborate on what you've said.
How do you know?	Show me your evidence.
Such as?	Provide some specific illustration or example.
Why? Why not?	Tell me about causal factors. Your answer might very well begin with the words <u>because</u> or <u>since</u> .
So what?	Explain the significance of what you've said. This question may be especially important to your conclusion.

A few appropriate questions will help you to complete your informal outline.



As each section moves toward more specific evidence, the kinds of questions change. Your reader will want you to support your generalizations, not simply repeat them. The questions “how do you know?” and “such as?” will take on increased importance. Used properly, they will help you to create additional sub-headings.