

# CREATING A FORMAL OUTLINE

## **Thesis:**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. Definition, Description, and History (as appropriate)
- B. Statement of Purpose
- C. Information Sources (including research methods and materials)
- D. Working Definitions (if appropriate)
- E. Limitations of the Report (if appropriate)
- F. Scope of Coverage (sequence of major topics in the body)

### **II. BODY**

- A. First Major Topic
  - 1. First subtopic of A
  - 2. Second subtopic of A
    - a. First subtopic of 2
    - b. Second subtopic of 2
      - (1) (And so on—subdivision carried as far as necessary)
- B. Second Major Topic
  - 1. (and so on)

### **III. CONCLUSION (where everything is tied together)**

A good outline also conforms to the following guidelines:

- It obeys the “rule of two”: each “main topic” should contain at least two subtopics; subtopics, if followed by sub-subtopics, should again contain at least two.

Portion of a “poor” outline	Portion of a “good” outline
<b>II. Body</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. First Major Topic</li><li>B. Second Major Topic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Subtopic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Sub-subtopic</li></ul></li></ul></li><li>C. Third Major Topic</li></ul>	<b>II. Body</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>D. First Major Topic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Subtopic</li><li>2. Subtopic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Sub-subtopic</li><li>b. Sub-subtopic</li><li>c. Sub-subtopic</li></ul></li></ul></li><li>E. Second Major Topic</li></ul>

- It avoids overlap: each topic addresses a distinct idea.
- It maintains coherence: subtopics and sub-subtopics relate directly to their major topics, rather than leading reader and writer off on tempting tangents.
- It maintains internal parallelism: all items at any given level are grammatically-similar