

Outline

Before you start writing the first draft of your essay or research paper, it is always useful to make an outline of your ideas. If you have already decided on your focus or topic, and you have a rough list of sources for support, then you are ready to prepare an outline.

An outline is simply a way to organize your ideas and information. Keep in mind that outlines are required to follow a format style (e.g., APA). The example below is an abbreviated version of what is often referred to as a formal or “traditional” outline. It is based on the five-paragraph essay model and can be expanded or condensed to fit the scope of your essay or research paper.

- I. Introduction
 - A. Strong Opening
 - B. Thesis Statement
- II. Body Paragraph #1—Topic Sentence #1
 - A. Supporting Evidence
 - 1. Name of and information from source
 - 2. Name of and information from source #2 (if applicable)
 - B. Explanation
 - 1. Explanation of source
 - 2. Explanation of source #2 (if applicable)
 - C. So What?
- III. Body Paragraph #2—Topic Sentence #2
 - A. Supporting Evidence
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - B. Explanation
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - C. So What?
- IV. Body Paragraph #3—Topic Sentence #3
 - A. Supporting Evidence
 - B. Explanation
 - C. So What?
- V. Conclusion
 - A. Rephrase of Thesis Statement
 - B. Strong Closing

Introduction

Create a strong opening statement(s) for your paper that generates interest and engages the reader. The **Thesis Statement (TS)** will be the last 1–3 sentences of the introduction.

Supporting Evidence

Integrate an appropriate example, quotation, paraphrase, statistic, case study, or other evidence to support your topic sentence.

Explanation

Explain how this evidence supports your topic sentence. Try to develop your explanation in 2–4 sentences.

So What?

What is significant or important about the ideas (topic sentence + evidence + explanation) in this paragraph? Remind your reader how all this information connects back to the TS.

Conclusion

The **TS** should be rephrased, rather than repeated verbatim, in the first 1–3 sentences of the conclusion. Avoid simply summarizing the main points in the conclusion: synthesize them. Then create closure for your paper.

To see what a complete outline looks like, refer to the model below. The thesis statement has been taken from the Thesis Statement Guide section of the Ashford Writing Center.

I. Introduction

A. Strong Opening

In the early days of television, a former Chairman of the Federal Communication Commission, invited television viewers to remain seated in front of their television sets for an entire day.

What they would observe, he warned, "...is a vast wasteland" (Minow, 1961, p.3). [Fifty years later, many people still agree with that statement.](#)

B. Thesis Statement

Although television programs can be educational, parents should regulate the amount of television their children watch because programs are not always intellectually stimulating, they can distort a child's perception of reality, and they inhibits social interaction.

II. Body Paragraph #1—Topic Sentence #1

While television has the potential to offer programs that can be seen as educational supplements, too much television has an even greater potential for turning children into passive viewers and getting in the way of intellectual stimulation.

A. Supporting Evidence

As a recent article from the University of Michigan Health Systems (2008) maintains, "Too much television can negatively affect early brain development. This is especially true at younger ages, when learning to talk and play with others is so important" (qtd. in "Television").

B. Explanation

Indeed, too much television can be detrimental to cognitive development because preschool-aged children need physical interaction, and television for older children acts as an unhealthy replacement for reading and being read to. Children need to engage in imaginative play; adolescents and teenagers benefit from getting fresh air and being more active.

C. So What?

While it would be too easy to dismiss every TV show directed at youths—in fact, PBS and Discovery Kids offer excellent programming—children's lives are increasingly centered around TV-watching and, thus, parents should regulate how much their kids are viewing regardless of content or perceived quality.

III. Body Paragraph #2—Topic Sentence #2

Moreover, without proper supervision or regulation, some television programs can give children a distorted view of the world.

A. Supporting Evidence

In the online article "How TV Affects Your Child," Dr. Mary Gavin (2008) points out that "TV characters often depict risky behaviors, such as smoking and drinking, and also reinforce gender-role and racial stereotypes."

B. Explanation

Certainly, seeing these types of behaviors and stereotypes exhibited by favorite television personalities and encouraged by favorite shows can contradict the values parents want to instill in their children, which can cause both tension and confusion. While television does have entertainment value, children cannot learn all the differences between right and wrong from it.

C. So What?

Although it is difficult to prevent children's total exposure to questionable social mores and limited multicultural representation in the media, parents can have some control by supervising their children's viewing as well as by talking about what is portrayed on television.

IV. Body paragraph #3—Topic Sentence #3

Finally, television can impede healthy relationship-building and impose on family time.

A. Supporting Evidence

For example, recent studies have found that the television is on most of the time in 51% of households and that "[k]ids with a TV in their bedroom spend an average of almost 1.5 hours more per day watching TV than kids without a TV in the bedroom" (qtd. in "Television").

B. Explanation

If children are spending this much time glued to their favorite television programs, and if parents do not have rules about how much is okay to watch, then children are not only spending less time on important cognitive development activities such as reading and doing homework, but they are also spending less time on social interaction with peers and important family time.

C. So What?

Given how long families are apart from each other during the week because of school and work, it is unfortunate that any extra time outside of those obligations should be wasted on watching television. Therefore, regulation is one key approach to ensure a family's closeness and the strength of the parents' bond with their children.

V. Conclusion

A. Rephrased Thesis Statement

Television can be both educational and entertaining for children; however, only in moderation. Thus, it is important that parents step in to supervise how much television their children watch and to ensure that television programs do not negatively affect their children's intellectual, psychological, and social development.

B. Strong Closing

As an alternative to turning on the television after dinner, some parents are substituting family fun nights, with planned activities such as board games or a book club night, where family members share what they learned from recent books they have read. Creative activities such as these combine intellectual stimulation, fun, and important family time. Best of all, they build lifelong family memories.