

The Writing Process: Outlining Process Samples

This document provides examples of carrying out the outlining process within the context of having a detailed prompt as well as having an open-ended prompt. Adjust this process to match your own personality and style. For example, some students have a hard time getting their ideas into words and may find it useful to draw concepts before converting it into written words.

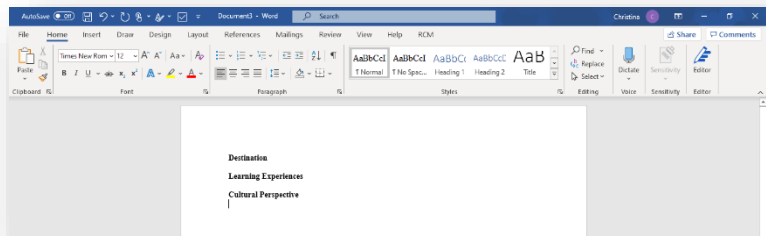
Sample of Outline with Detailed Prompt

Prompt: Describe an experience where you visited a place different from where you live. Where did you go, and how was it different? What did you learn? How does this relate to the readings on diversity and culture? Provide at least three examples for each.

Step 1: Construct Main Headings

If you have a focused prompt, use the questions being asked to create “points” that need to be covered in the paper. These do not need to be long, just descriptive enough for you to follow along as you create your outline. These points will often become the main headings (level 1 in APA Formatting) throughout the paper. Note that they can be changed later. This is just an exercise to help get you started by giving you a rough outline.

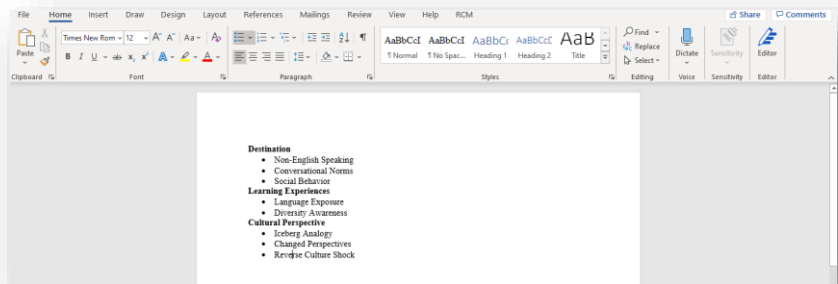
This prompt, in particular, is asking clear questions to be covered within the assignment. Begin by separating the main topics to be covered and writing/typing them on a blank page, leaving some space in between for the next step. Then, write **Destination**, **Learning Experiences**, and **Cultural Perspective** in bold.



Step 2: Form Subheadings

When using the focused prompt, use the questions being asked to help guide the ideas you are presenting.

For this example, the first heading for the focused prompt is “Destination” in order to address the question “Where did you go, and how was it different?” from the prompt.



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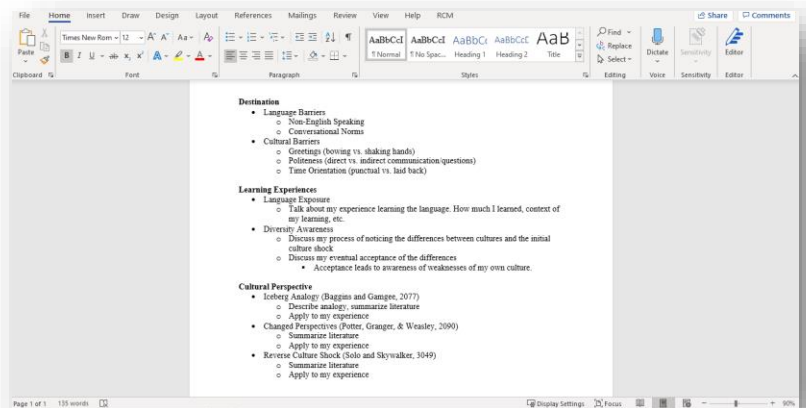
Under this heading, write things such as “Non-English speaking” and plan to discuss the experience of being in a place where our first language was not commonly understood. Also write “Conversational norms” and plan to discuss how conversations were different, more or less warm and friendly, personal or more superficial. A heading for “Social Behavior” may also be included to describe other behaviors and societal norms observed. Write all subheadings as a bulleted list. These subheadings will later be converted into APA level 2 headings in the paper. This step will be repeated for all the sections until there is a complete picture of what will be covered in the paper.

Step 3: Review and Revise

In a focused prompt, it is important to ensure that you have covered the questions being asked. In this stage, you will determine if the structure and order of the headings makes the most sense. If you’re being asked to compare perspectives or ideas, consider including subheadings in your outline at this point to further organize the flow of the paper.

In addition, you may decide to reframe some of the headings you created before. For example, in the “Destination” category, the outline lists Non-English Speaking, Conversational Norms, and Social Behavior. However, Non-English Speaking and Conversational Norms seem to go well together. The category can be broadened by changing it to “Language Barriers,” within which Non-English Speaking and Conversational Norms can be discussed. The sub-points can be listed under the new, broader label (Language Barriers) so that the writer is prompted to include these topics. Depending on how the paper is developed, “Non-English Speaking” and “Conversational Norms” could become an APA level 3 headings or they could just be points to guide the writer. In addition, to have some parallel structure, “Social Behavior” could be re-framed as “Cultural Barriers” and sub-topics can be listed in the outline.

Based on the prompt, the section “Learning Experiences” will primarily draw on personal experience. Consider what topics will be covered within each subheading to provide direction. “Cultural Perspective,” however, will be where the literature should be referenced. Citations can be added that the writer would like to use and provide depth to the paper. Note that citations can be included in other portions of the paper, but including the main ones ensures that the writer is reminded of the major pieces of literature they would like to reference. Because this sample is imaginary, this section is vague. Note that for some, having a vaguer outline is useful for writing while others may prefer a more complex outline before writing. Try both approaches and see what works well for you.



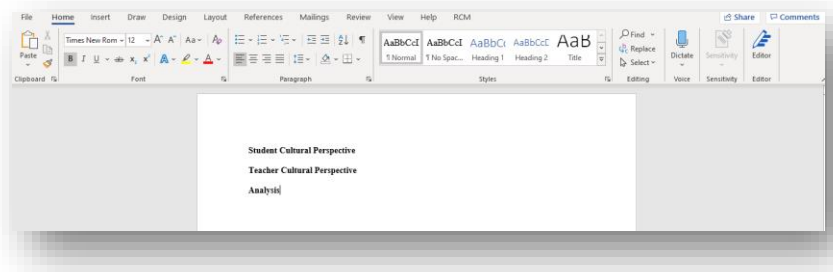
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Sample of Outline with Open-Ended Prompt

Prompt: What role does individual cultural perspectives play in educational contexts. Reference the literature.

Step 1: Construct Main Headings

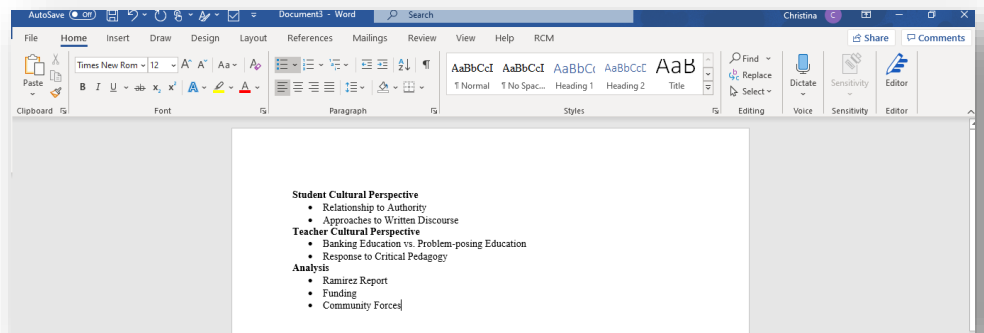
This prompt is not very specific and requires the writer to choose a topic before writing an outline. For this sample, we will choose student/teacher perspectives. If you have a hard time picking a topic, write down all the things that interest you. Are there relationships between any of them? Which stands out to you the most? Some writers struggle with selecting a topic and committing to it because they have a wide variety of interests. If you relate to this, pick one to work on for this paper, and keep the list of other topics you would like to explore. You can do this later either for a different paper (when applicable) or as possible writing topics when you have finished your program.



Once a topic is selected, try to isolate a few main points of what should be discussed within the paper. Using our blank page, we can write **Student Cultural Perspective**, **Teacher Cultural Perspective**, and **Analysis** in bold. These are broad domains that will act as a starting point in constructing the outline. Remember, these can be altered later if there are more/less/different things to say as the outline progresses.

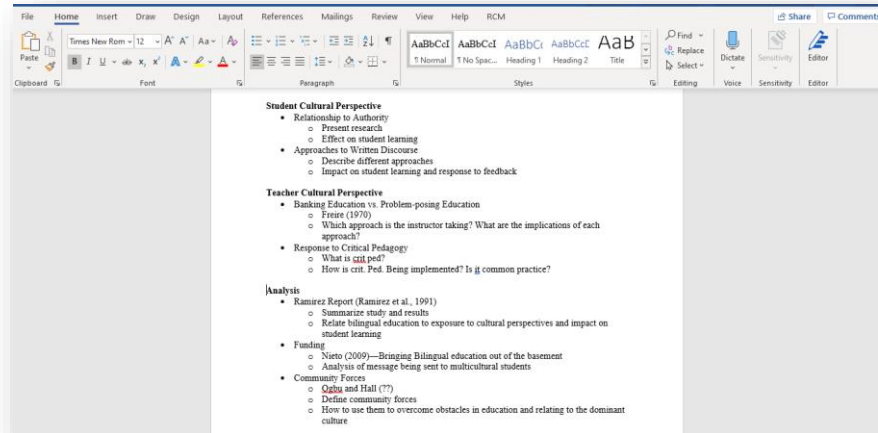
Step 2: Form Subheadings

The first heading on the open-ended prompt is “Student Cultural Perspective” and the task is to describe the role individual cultural perspectives play in education.



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Under this heading, the writer may choose to include “Relationship to Authority” and provide a framework for cultural perspectives that frame how students interact with their instructors. They may also write “Approaches to Written Discourse” and plan to discuss cultural differences in relation to written discourse and this impact on students who are exposed to multiple approaches. This step will be repeated for all the sections until there is a complete picture of what will be covered in the paper.



Step 3: Review and Revise

In an open-ended prompt, determine if the headings adequately capture the ideas being presented. As research is being conducted, the headings may change, and there may be additional topics that are relevant to the main topic. Adjust the outline at any time. It may also be helpful to have the outline in front of you as you conduct your research to make changes as needed. For example, the outline may be modified by eliminating the analysis section and incorporating the analysis throughout the paper. Funding may be eliminated as it is irrelevant to the broader topic.

