

Reading Outlines

What they are:

Reading outlines are just like your typical outline only reversed. In a typical outline you write an outline as preparation for writing something else and you use your outline to structure your paper. However, in a reading outline, you start with a piece of writing (someone else's) and construct an outline from it based on the structure of the writing. Reading outlines are really reverse outlines.

How to construct them:

All outlines are essentially structured lists. The sentences are the specific information, the content, of the outline while the shape is the form of the outline. Together, content and form provide a richer, more complete understanding than either a simple list of key concepts or a summary. Hence, Rule #1.

Rule #1: Outlines are not simple lists or summaries.

Outlines can only be as helpful as they are in depth. This means that outlines must be comprehensive and detailed. Hence, Rule #2.

Rule #2: Generally speaking, every paragraph ought to have its own section in your outline (complete with sub-sections)

In order for your outline to be useful it must contain complete thoughts and not just vague references to vague concepts. Hence, Rule #3.

Rule #3: Generally speaking, every line in an outline ought to contain at least one complete sentence.

Outlines also need to be useful study aids. That means that they need to balance detailed comprehensiveness with brevity. Hence, Rule #4.

Rule #4: Generally speaking, outlines should be approximately 25% the length of the reading material.

My criteria for grading Reading Outlines:

I will be grading your outlines based on the four rules above. There are some pitfalls that many students fall into that I want to warn you about:

Pitfall #1: Making a list and then indenting some of the items to make it look like a genuine outline. Write the outline as an outline.

Pitfall #2: Writing a summary and then breaking it up into outline format. Write the outline as an outline.

Pitfall #3: Leaving out whole sections because you are bored by them. Be comprehensive!

Pitfall #4: Making your outline too short to be helpful or too long to be understood. Make them just right (you should be able to tell what's too little or what's too much).