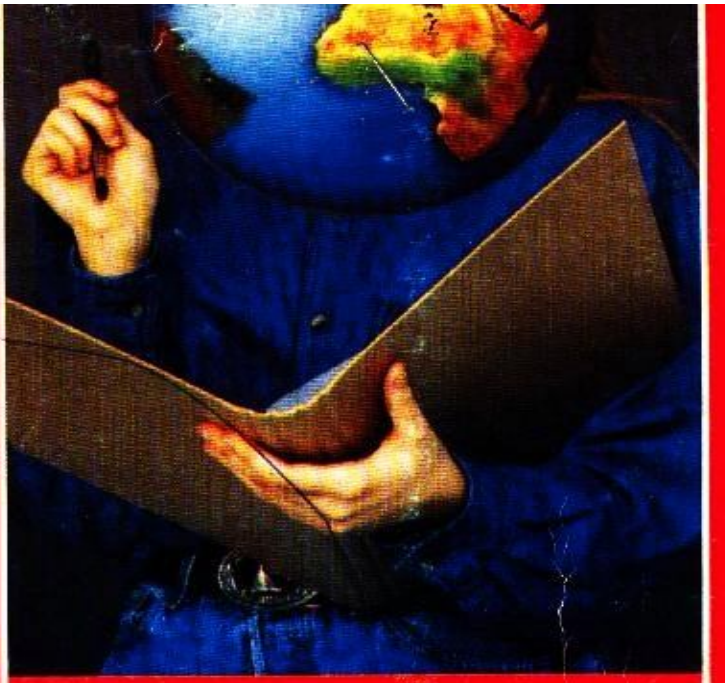

Fundamentals of English and Communication Skills

Edited by
Ngozi Anyachonkeya, Ph.D
Richard C. Ihejirika

Chapter Eight

Outlining
by
Richard C. Ihejirika

There are some basic skills a student or learners generally need to possess and one of them is ability to draw outline. Outlining is very useful in all aspects of learning, including writing, reading and even notetaking. An outline has been defined as *a formal, detailed statement of the content and structure of a piece of (either written or spoken) communication*. A well written outline shows at a glance the substance of any written or spoken material, the way they are related and also arranged.

Uses of Outline

An Outline is very useful in writing. When a writer chooses his topic, the next thing he does is to put in outline form the ideas that are relevant to the topic. An outline is to a writer what a building plan is to a builder. Just as a builder builds a solid and beautiful house through the use of a building plan, the same way a writer turns out an excellent write-up through the use of outline. The students are therefore advised to always proceed their essay writing with an outline.

One skill that can always facilitate reading comprehension is outlining. Through the process of outlining one can summarize a chapter of a book or even a book as a whole while reading. In notetaking, outlining is also very useful. Students are always in the habit of wanting to put down whatever a lecturer says during the course of his teaching. This should not be the case as a good note is the one that attempts to summarize the main ideas of a lecture.

Outlining is a device that can aid the memory. If one begins one's writing by putting the ideas down in form of outline, the chances of forgetting or skipping the ideas are competely ruled out as one would pick the ideas one after the other and develop them. Even in

reading and notetaking, the story is the same as the main ideas put down would help to recall what was read or what was taught. On the whole, outlining is a skill that gives room for active participation in the learning process.

How to Draw an Outline

There are acceptable procedures in drawing an outline. Unless the procedures are rigidly followed, the outline may not serve the purpose for which it is meant. A well developed outline should be capable of representing the main ideas of the material it is representing and also show how the ideas are related. As outline is meant to show the major divisions and subdivision(s) of the substance of a given material, there are various systems of notation that are used to show the relationship between the major division and subdivision. The notation systems will be discussed here and they include:

1. **A Combination of Roman Numerals, Capital Letters and Arabic Numerals** This is a situation where the three systems are combined, each representing a division. Example: I, II, III, IV, V, etc., represent main divisions. A, B, C, D, E, F, G, etc., represent the subdivisions of the major division. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, etc., represent the subdivisions of the second subdivision. (a), (b), (c), etc., represent the subdivisions of the third subdivision.

2. **Combination of Arabic Numerals and Full Stops.** This is a situation where the Arabic numerals and full stops are combined to show the major divisions and subdivisions.

Example

1. **- represents major division.**
   1 . 1
   1 . 2
   1 . 3 - **represent subdivision of major division.**

2. **- represents major division.**
   2 . 1
   2 . 2
   2 . 3

   2 . 3 . 1
   2 . 3 . 2
   2 . 3 . 3 - represent the subdivisions of the second subdivision.

Apart from the notation systems, there are other rules that should be observed when drawing outline. The rules include:

1. The subdivisions should be indented under the preceding division.
2. All entries of the same level should have uniform indentation.
3. In outlining, there is room for multiple subdivisions. What this simply means is that where there is a major division one, there should be a corresponding major division two. It is also necessary that every division must have at least two parts.
4. Outlines should have parallel structures. The grammatical forms adopted for the divisions should be uniform. If, for instance, the first major division is in simple sentence form, the subsequent major divisions should also be written in simple sentences.

Procedure for Outlining a Chapter of a Book.

Use of English: A Text, compiled by the Department of English, University of Ife, outlines the procedure for outlining a chapter of a book, as follows:

1. **Identifying the Topic**
   i. Use the title of the chapter in determining the topic.
   ii. Find the topic sentences of introductory paragraphs.
   iii. The topic is indicated in an outline by the use of Roman numerals I, II, III, etc.

If you are outlining only one chapter in a book, however, it is not necessary to do this.

2. **Identifying the Major Subdivisions of the Topic.**
   i. Read the development sentences of the introdutory paragraph.
   ii. Indicate these in an outline by the use of capital letters: A, B, C, etc.

3. **Identifying Subdivisions of Major Subdivisions**
   i. Read the developmental paragraphs of the chapter. Each major subdivision forms the topic of at least one developmental paragraph.
   ii. Indicate each new development, which explains or illustrates a major subdivision by Arabic numerals, 1, 2, 3, etc., and second by small letters a, b, c, etc.

4. **Further Divisions**
   i. You should be able to recognize these by now; e.g. when two or three examples are given of a subdivision, which you have entered in the outline under the small letter *a*.
   ii. These should be indicated separately by Arabic numerals in parenthesis – (1), (2), (3), etc., and by small letters in parenthesis – (a), (b), (c), etc.

Model Outline

Based on our discussions above, we shall go further to demonstrate the procedure by drawing two model outlines.

Model Outline I
Examination Malpractice

1. There is examination malpractice at all levels of the education system, namely:

a. Primary
b. Secondary
c. Tertiary

2. **Examination malpractive is manifested in several ways.**
   a. collaboration
   b. impersonation
   c. copying

3. **Some factors are responsible for examination malpractice.**
   a. Moral decadence
   b. Lack of adequate preparation
   c. Poor teaching
   d. High cost of education

4. **Examination malpractice has some consquences**
   a. Half-baked graduates
   b. Unemployment
   c. Expulsion

5. **It could be controlled through:**
   a. Effective teaching and learning
   b. Reduction in the cost of education
   c. De-emphasizing overreliance on certificate.

The above is a model outline on the topic "Examination Malpractice". It is an embodiment of the main ideas relevant to the topic and how they are related. In drawing the outline, the procedure we discussed earlier is strictly observed on notation. There is the combination of the Arabic numerals and small letters of the alphabet for the major divisions and the small letters of the alphabet for the subdivisions. Also, parallel structure is maintained, while the major divisions are written in sentences, the subdivisions are written in phrases. Besides, every subdivision has at least two parts.

Model Outline II

Biopower - Energy from Living Things

I. *Battery Mode of Bacterial Biocell*

- 1.1 developed in 1962 for a radio state, range 15 miles.
- 1.2 practical amounts of electricity produced from life put to use
- 1.3 consisted of a liquid fuel with bacteria that changed the fuel to electricity.
- 1.4 can be used for a number of purposes
  - 1.4.1 radios
  - 1.4.2 signals for ships
  - 1.4.3 lights
- 1.5 cheap source of electricity because it uses a wide range of waste materials,
  - 1.5.1 sea water
  - 1.5.2 grass cutting and dry leaves

II. ***History of Biopower***

- 2.1 electricity from living cells no new idea
  - 2.1.1 Benjamin Franklin found it in lightning
  - 2.1.3 Galvanic found it in the nerves and muscles of animals
  - 2.1.4 Humans produce it in hearts and brains

- 2.2 Not until the 20th century that work was begun on producing electricity by bacteria.
  - 2.2.1 1st results published in 1912
  - 2.2.2 since 1960 research has been considerable and biocell considered practical source of electricity.

III. ***The Biocell's Future***

- 3.1 No mass produced models yet
  - 3.1.1 other models simpler and more efficient

3.1.2 biocell rather inefficient – uses 50% of fuel to feed bacteria.

3.2 However, because biocell uses waste as fuel, it is a source of electricity we should exploit.

3.3 Research on biocell has benefited other areas:

3.3.1 Food industries, especially the cheese industry.

3.3.2 Farming and chemistry.

(Culled from *Use of English: A Text* 1988:75-77)

The notation system used in this outline model is a combination of the Arabic numerals and full stop. Apart from the notation system, the model kept to the rules by ensuring parallel structures as well as multiple subdivisions.

Students are advised to practise more on outlining as it is a skill that would aid them a great deal in their learning process.