Outlining Your Essay

An outline is a logical arrangement of ideas with four main characteristics:

1. **Division**: Every major point should have at least two sub-points, which may be divided further.
2. **Coordination**: Items on the same level (I, II, and III or A, B, and C) carry the same weight.
3. **Subordination**: Major headings should be general; minor headings should be more specific.
4. **Parallel Structure**: Items within a single list should be of the same type (e.g., all sentences).

**Tips for Outlining:**
- **Plan ahead** before researching and writing. Keep your end goal in mind.
- The formation of a **thesis** will guide the outline’s construction.
- An outline shows the **relationships** between ideas and the relative **importance** of support.

**Typical Essay Structure:**

**I. Introduction**: This section should build up to a specific thesis.
   - A. Capture the reader’s **attention** with one or two of the following:
     1. A brief story (*anecdote*)
     2. A relevant quote
     3. An interesting fact or figure
     4. A question in need of an answer
   - B. Provide any **background** information necessary to understand the issue at hand.
   - C. Communicate your main idea in a clear, concise **thesis statement**.

**II. Body**: In a short essay, this is typically three or four paragraphs.
   - A. Begin each paragraph with a clear **topic sentence**, which explains, supports, or justifies one aspect of the idea expressed in the thesis.
   - B. **Support** your claims with explanation, examples, and evidence.
   - C. Provide smooth **transitions** from one paragraph to the next.

**II. Conclusion**: This is the mirror image of your introduction.
   - A. **Recap**. Summarize key points and provide the insight on your thesis.
   - B. Provide **closure**. Give the reader something to think about. This may be:
     - A piece of advice
     - A significant lesson to be learned
     - A call to action
     - A relevant prediction
     - An unanswered question to be explored further