Creating an outline is an essential part of the prewriting process as it can help you visualize what you need to include in your paper and the structure of the paper. Creating a Section Heading Outline is a specific way to outline APA style papers.

How Do I Create My Outline?

Use Assignment Instructions to Determine Headings

- Each first level heading will correspond to a main section of your paper. These sections will be clearly laid out in the assignment instructions, often denoted by a first-order bullet-point, number, or capital letter.

- Each second level heading will correspond to a sub-section section of your paper. These sections will be clearly laid out in the assignment instructions, often denoted by an indented/second-order bullet-point, number, or lower case letter.

- Each third level heading will correspond to a sub-sub-section section of your paper. These sections will often be less clearly laid out in the assignment instructions. While they will sometimes be denoted by a third-order bullet-point, number, or letter, oftentimes you can divide your own second level assignment instructions into important sub-topics, and create your own third level headings that way.

Identify All Needed Headings Then Fill in Significant Information for Each

- Identify all first, second, and third level headings, and type them out in the appropriate format on the page.

- For each section, estimate the number of pages or paragraphs needed, and then list all content (such course concepts, definitions of theories, data/statistics, issues, etc.) that will be needed. Use the corresponding Section Heading Outline Worksheet to help you.

First Level Headings

These Headings Introduce Main Sections of Paper

You must include first level headings in every paper you write. First level headings are: centered, bolded, with the first letter of each major work capitalize.

For example, if your assignment has 4 main sections, your paper should have four main sections, plus, as always, your introduction and conclusion sections. Introduction and Conclusion Sections are always introduced with first level headings. That means that your paper will have six first-level headings – one for the introduction, one for the conclusion, and
four for the four main sections in your paper.

EXAMPLE

Part A: Legislation and Political Context: What is the “Elevator Speech” Overview?

Part B: Problem Analysis: Why is this Bill / Policy Important? Why Should the Mayor Care?

(1) Describe and analyze the social problem the legislation seeks to impact.

(2) Describe how the legislation would solve or ease the problem.

Part C: Existing Resources to Deal with Problem

Part D: Stakeholders: Getting Down to the "Politics" of the Issue

Sections A, B, C, D (highlighted in yellow above) are the assignment’s main sections. As such, your paper’s first level headings would be:

- Introduction
  - Legislation and Political Context
  - Problem Analysis
  - Existing Resources
  - Stakeholders Conclusion
- Conclusion

Second Level Headings

These Headings Introduce Sub-sections of Paper

You will include second level headings on most, but not all, papers you write. Second level headings are justified to the left, bolded, with the first letter of each major work capitalized. Second-level headings should likewise be based on assignment guidelines. For example, if one main section of the assignment is broken down into two separate points, create one second-level heading for each of those points.

EXAMPLE

Part B: Problem Analysis: Why is this Bill / Policy Important? Why Should the Mayor Care?

(1) Describe and analyze the social problem the legislation seeks to impact.
Describe how the legislation would solve or ease the problem.

Numbers 1 and 2 (highlighted in green above) ask you for specific details within the problem analysis, so under the problem analysis first-level heading, you would have two second-level headings:

**Problem Analysis**

Description and Analysis of Problem

Impact of Legislation on Problem

**Third Level Headings**

**These Headings Introduce Sub-sub-sections of Paper**

You only need to use third level headings in a few papers, when the assignment instructions call for them. Third level headings are one tab in front the left, bolded, with only the very first letter capitalized, and a period at the end. Third level sections begin on the same line as the heading. Third-level headings are also based on assignment guidelines. For example, if a subsection of the assignment has numerous questions below it, you can create a third-level heading for each sub-question/section to clearly and adequately address each point.

**EXAMPLE**

Part B: Problem Analysis: Why is this Bill / Policy Important? Why Should the Mayor Care?

Describe and analyze the social problem the legislation seeks to impact. Provide an overview of the problem in terms of the **core causes** and its magnitude. The Mayor needs to know why this is even a "problem"? What is the **scope and magnitude** of the problem? How **important is the issue for the community**?

As seen above, within number one - description and analysis of the problem - you are asked for numerous details (highlighted in blue). To ensure that you address each of these details separately and clearly, you can create third-level headings for each, as below:

**Problem Analysis**

Description and Analysis of Problem

- **Core causes.**
- **Scope and magnitude.**
- **Importance of issue.**