APA Section Heading Outline
Quick Guide

WHY CREATE AN OUTLINE?
Creating an outline is an essential part of the prewriting process. Create your full outline prior to beginning any of your writing for an idea of:

- What information to include in your paper (according to assignment instructions)
- What you will need to research
- How much space you need to allocate for each section

Moreover, your outline will enable you to keep your ideas clear, coherent, and organized.

HOW DO I CREATE MY OUTLINE?

- Use headings in your paper.
  - First-level headings are for your paper’s main sections
  - Second-level headings are for subsections within a main section
  - Third-level headings are for subsections within a subsection of your paper
- Shorten assignment headings/questions to create your headings.

FIRST-LEVEL HEADINGS
Create your first-level headings based on the assignment outlines. For example, if your assignment has 4 main sections, your paper should have four main sections, plus, as always, your introduction and conclusion. 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:

  Legislation and Political Context
  
  Problem Analysis
  
  Existing Resources
  
  Stakeholders
  
  Conclusion

FIRST-LEVEL HEADINGS ARE CENTERED AND BOLD, WITH MAIN WORDS CAPITALIZED.

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SECOND-LEVEL HEADINGS

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.
2. 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

SECOND-LEVEL HEADINGS ARE LEFT-ALIGNED AND BOLD, WITH MAIN WORDS CAPITALIZED.

THIRD-LEVEL HEADINGS

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.

You will not always need to use third-level headings! Only use these if your second-level sections require more breaking down for clarity.

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 this 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.

THIRD-LEVEL HEADINGS ARE ONE TAB IN FROM LEFT, BOLD, WITH ONLY THE FIRST WORD CAPITALIZED AND A PERIOD AT THE END. ALSO, THIRD-LEVEL SECTIONS BEGIN ON THE SAME LINE AS THE HEADING.