LECTURE: OUTLINING

Each essay you write in ESL 21A must be accompanied by an outline. You can think of this as a kind of blueprint. If your essay were a building, your outline would be the plan or skeleton from which the building is constructed. In addition to being useful for planning before writing, outlines can also be extracted after the fact from reading (sort of like taking an X-ray, where you can see “inside” the skeleton of a piece of writing and thus, better understand the author’s method of organizing and presenting ideas.)

Outlining before writing helps you to organize, unify and support your topic adequately. Some students might ask: What do you mean by ‘outline?’ How do I go about outlining before writing?

A formal outline follows a rigid format that never varies. Once you learn the skill of outlining, you can use it in all your courses, not just English, but outline mastery requires practice.

1. An outline is a hierarchy that shows items in relation to one another. It also shows their relative importance and indicates whether they are general or specific.

2. An outline uses a specific system of numbering, lettering and spacing to indicate importance, generality, specificity, relationship.

3. An outline acts as a kind of classification system. For example, when you think of the category “vegetables,” you can break that down into more specific categories of vegetables before you list specific examples.

   VEGETABLES:
   I. Root vegetables
   II. Green leafy vegetables

4. Or you could start with specific examples (say, of certain food items) and then try to find an umbrella category to describe them. Try it now. What category title would you use to encompass the following list?:
   Pizza
   Hamburgers
   French Fries
If you said “Junk Food,” you are right! Notice, the category junk food is general, while the food items are specific. Formal outline format gives us a way to show that difference.

5. The following is a formal outline “template,” so you can see exactly how an outline about Benefits of Exercise works:

I. Physiological benefits
   A. Cardiovascular health
      1. lower blood pressure
      2. lower cholesterol
      3. lower resting heart rate
   B. Muscle strength
   C. Bone strength
      1. protection against osteoporosis
         a. lessen chance of fractures
         b. prevent arthritis
      2. improved posture
   D. Weight control

II. Emotional Benefits
   A. relaxation
   B. stress reduction
   C. positive feedback about appearance

Given the same topic to write about, you might organize your ideas in a different way or put different items into each category, but the outline format (which never varies) gives you a mold to put your ideas into. You must **MEMORIZE** the format!! You must use this **EXACT FORMAT**!!

I.
   A.
   B.
   C.
      1.
      2.
         a.
         b.
   D.

II.

Usually, where there is a 1, there is a 2; where there is an A(a), there is a B(b). Roman numerals and left justification indicate GENERAL
INFORMATION. As material becomes more specific, different symbols (capital letters, Arabic numerals, small letters) indicate greater degrees of specificity. As material becomes more specific, it appears farther from the left hand margin and closer to the middle of the page.

Please complete all exercises that relate to outlining in *College Writing Skills with Readings*. Also complete webliography outline tasks. When you submit your essays, make sure each one is accompanied by a formal outline.