

For your I-Search Paper, you will prepare your preliminary source outline prior to beginning your research, and it will list the question you are seeking an answer for and the main sources which you hope will provide you with the answers you seek.

The basic format will look something like this:

Sample Source Outline for the I-Search Paper (Basic Format)

Question:

- I. What I Know, Assume or Imagine
- II. Source 1
- III. Source 2
- IV. Source 3
- V. Source 4
- VI. Source 5
- VII. Source 6
- VIII. Source 7
- IX. Source 8
- X. Source 9
- XI. Source 10
- XII. What I Learned

The following pages will show you samples of the preliminary source outline, with examples of potential sources.

Sample Source Outline for the I-Search Paper With Preliminary Sources

Question: Should I have laser surgery to correct my vision?

- I. What I Know, Assume or Imagine
- II. Interviews with doctors
- III. Medical Journal articles
- IV. Pamphlets
- V. Advertisements
- VI. Interviews with patients who have undergone the treatment
- VII. Articles from “general-audience” magazines
- VIII. Internet sources
- IX. What I Learned

On this outline, the writer has identified the question and a number of potential sources to look for answers. However, the following page will show you a more complete example of the preliminary source outline.

Sample Source Outline for the I-Search Paper With Preliminary Sources

Question: Should I have laser surgery to correct my vision?

- I. What I Know, Assume or Imagine
- II. Interviews with doctors
 - A. Dr. Jones
 - B. Dr. Smith
- III. Medical Journal articles
- IV. Pamphlets
- V. Advertisements
- VI. Interviews with patients who have undergone the treatment
 - A. Susan Jones
 - B. John Smith
 - C. Phyllis Lee
- VII. Articles from “general-audience” magazines
- VIII. Internet sources
- IX. What I Learned

Notice that in this sample outline, the writer has gone on to include not only possible generalized sources, but named names as well, giving the evaluator (your teacher) a much clearer picture of how successful he or she is likely to be.

PREPARING THE PRELIMINARY OUTLINE FOR THE RESEARCH PAPER

After completing your preliminary thesis, preliminary reading and preliminary bibliography, you are now ready to begin to shape the structure of your research for your paper.

This is done by preparing a preliminary outline of the major topics, and sub-topics which you will use to support your thesis statement. The purpose of the preliminary outline is to provide a general guide to the topics and areas which you will need to research for detailed information. When you take notes on this detailed information, you will label each note card with the preliminary outline heading that includes and is supported by the notes s information. Do this in pencil until you are certain that the categories you have selected for the outline will not change.

INFORMATION THAT DOES NOT FIT

If, as you do your research, you come across information which does not seem to fit your preliminary outline, you will have to determine whether it is because:

- it does not relate to your thesis, and therefore your paper, (in which case, forget it!!)
- you did not know about it or forgot to include it as an important topic in your preliminary outline.

If the latter is the case, revise your preliminary outline on the spot, and add the new topic where it fits into the original outline. Then label your note cards accordingly. **The preliminary outline is not a sacred, unchangeable document. It can and should grow and change to accommodate your growing expertise on the subject; however, the outline must always fit and support your thesis statement.**

OUTLINE FORM

Your preliminary outline is usually a fairly simple one, with major topics and sub-topics listed, but without specific examples and details, yet. This information will appear later in your final revised outline (see pages 64-71) which you will use, after you have completed all your research, to write your paper.

You will be using Roman numerals (I, II, III, IV, U, etc.) for the major topics in your outline. Under each Roman numeral, you will use capital letters (A, B, C, D, etc.) for sub-points under the Roman numerals. For further refinements, you will use Arabic numbers (1, 2, 3, etc.) and then lower-case (a, b, c, d, etc.)

The thesis statement always appears at the top of any outline, so that you will remain focused on what you are trying to prove.

The preliminary outline is written in standard outline form, using the numeral-letter hierarchy of Roman numeral followed by capital letter followed by Arabic number and then lowercase letter. Each new sub-category must be indented, usually under the first letter of the first word in the previous category. The Roman numeral main idea headings always return to the left hand margin. This produces a visual pattern to the outline which shows all the parts of any idea “tucked under” that idea.

The **preliminary outline** is usually written in topic outline form and is usually only developed to the first two levels of outline (Roman numeral, capital letter); however, follow your teacher's instructions on this.

THE PRELIMINARY OUTLINE FORM AS IT APPEARS ON THE PAGE

THESIS: (Stated *fully* here)

I. Introduction

II. First main idea or topic

- A. First sub-idea
- B. Second sub-idea

The preliminary outline generally uses only the first two levels of outlining (Roman numerals and capital letters).

III. Second main idea or topic

- A. First sub-idea
- B. Second sub-idea
- C. Third sub-idea

Note that each is "lined up" neatly beneath the prior category. The periods of the Roman numerals form a straight line, as do the capital letters, etc.

IV. Third main idea or topic

- A. First sub-idea
- B. Second sub-idea

Each main idea might have two, three, four, or more sub-ideas beneath it - as appropriate to your needs. (Use A, B, C, D, E, etc.)

V. Fourth main idea or topic

A. First sub-idea

- B. Second sub-idea
- C. Third sub-idea

Use as many Roman numerals as you have main ideas or topics. This sample preliminary outline just happens to have five main topics, but you may have fewer or greater number. Always end with a final Roman numeral for your conclusion paragraph.

VI. Fifth main idea or topic

- A. First sub—idea
- B. Second sub—idea

VII. Conclusion

IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER ABOUT OUTLINING:

ANY DIVISION OF A TOPIC MUST ALWAYS HAVE AT LEAST TWO (2) PARTS.

Who ever heard of dividing anything into fewer than two parts? (If you do not believe it, try it!) Logic requires that there be a II to complement a I and a B to complement an A.

THEREFORE, ANY “A” MUST HAVE A “B.” ANY “1” MUST HAVE A “2,” ETC.

You should CAPITALIZE the first letter of the first word in the outline topic or phrase, but not the subsequent words, unless they are proper nouns. Your preliminary outline is not made up of sentences, but only “phrases” or “topics,” so do not conclude them with a period. (The thesis statement listed at the top of the outline should be in complete sentences and should end with a period.)

There is not a “certain magic number” of major points (Roman numerals) that a term paper outline must have. Unlike the 5-paragraph essay, which must always have three major points or paragraphs, the term paper may have 7 or 10 or 13 or as many as you need to fully and persuasively prove your thesis. The number of major divisions must be determined by your thesis and main points, as well as the support data you find. It is unlikely that you would have less than four major points, plus your introduction and conclusion, but check with your own teacher as to the number of points best for your particular thesis and support. Ultimately, a major point may have one or several paragraphs devoted to it.

Most teachers will expect you to have a preliminary outline while you are still researching and reading. It makes sense for your outline to evolve during the research stage as a “working” outline that will be revised continually. Topics will be added, dropped, and changed as your research continues

If your teacher requires that the preliminary outline be turned in typed, be sure to note that the thesis statement is single-spaced at the top, but everything else is double-spaced.

If all this seems confusing, then look at the two examples of preliminary outlines provided on the following pages.

Preliminary Outline

Thesis: Mark Twain's writings show the strong influence of his home town of Hannibal. The people, places, events he experienced there, as well as the cultural values he learned, all show up in his novels and stories.

- I. Introduction
- II. People who influenced Twain
 - A. Friends
 - B. Family
 - C. Others/acquaintances in Hannibal
- III. Places that influenced Twain
 - A. Mississippi River
 - B. Countryside of Hannibal
 - C. Town of Hannibal
- IV. Events and experiences Twain had in Hannibal
 - A. Schooling
 - B. Steamboating
 - C. Going to church
- V. Cultural values and attitudes
 - A. Frontier ethics
 - B. Slavery
- VI. Conclusion

Note that, while brief, this preliminary outline is based directly on the thesis statement. The four sub—topic areas listed in the thesis become the four Roman numerals in the body of the outline. In fact, writing a good thesis statement makes writing a preliminary outline easy. The outline also focuses your research and reading; you now know what to look for as you read. You can and will still add and change a lot, but the preliminary outline directs the rest of your research activities.

Preliminary Outline

Thesis: In fewer than ten years, the personal computer has become the most influential piece of technology in America. Despite a “slow start,” the personal computer has now revolutionized the way we function in homes, schools, business, and government.

- I. Introduction
- II. Historical background
 - A. Early computers
 - B. “Slow start” of computer acceptance
 - C. Personal computer revolution
- III. Computers in the home
 - A. Statistics
 - B. Implementation/uses, and influence
- IV. Computers in the schools
 - A. Statistics
 - B. Implementation/uses, and influence
- V. Computers in business
 - A. Statistics
 - B. Implementation/uses, and influence
- VI. Computers in government
 - A. Statistics
 - B. Implementation/uses, and influence
- VII. Predictions for the future
- VIII. Conclusion

Note that in this outline, some historical background (Roman numeral II) about early computers and a “slow start” to the computer revolution is warranted for understanding. You should not, however, include historical or biographical material unless it is directly relevant to your thesis.

A glance at the above suggests that the writer could easily separate the “B” topic in points III through VI into the next level of classification (1, 2) beneath it. If the student finds a great deal of material on “implementation/uses” as well as “influence,” these might even become separate sub-ideas and be labeled “B” and “C,” instead.