

An **Outline** is an organised list of major and minor points used to map out the structure of an essay. We choose the verb *to build* for our outlines, instead of *to write*, because we think of them as a structure for our ideas. They are the frame from which we will turn our thoughts into sentences, paragraphs, and full essays.

How to do it

There are many options for an outline, so make it work for you! Some people like to have each line in an outline as a short phrase, but others like whole sentences or quotations. Here one version of the basic idea:

Topic: Critical Analysis of Zombie Apocalypse Transportation

Research Question: Why are there no bicycles used in zombie apocalypse films?

- I. *Introduction Hook:* Where are the bikes?
- II. *Thesis statement:* The absence of bicycles in zombie apocalypse films is more than just plot contrivance--it is a conspiracy.
- III. *Essay structure sentence:* To understand this limitation, we will first discuss important films, then the merits of bicycle function, and finally some new understandings behind the anti-bicycle apocalypse.
- IV. *Background:* Films: *The Road*, *28 Days Later*, *Shaun of the Dead*, *Zombieland*

Resulting Sample Paragraph:

The world is overtaken by zombies, but where are the bikes? In film after film, un-infected characters face the difficult task of moving from a dangerous place to a safer one. Often it is on foot or by car and there are various risks (fuel, noise, exposure, speed, etc.) in both options. A largely unexplored transport option is the bicycle. Which raises the question: why are there no bikes? They are efficient, quiet, and available. The reactionary response would argue that it is a conspiracy—but by whom? In order to answer such questions, this paper will begin with a discussion of relevant films to establish the trend. Then, this paper will offer the merits of the bicycle as a superior zombie-avoidance transport. Finally, this paper will expose the anti-bicycle and pro-automobile conspiracy foisted on viewers. Spoiler alert: it's all about OIL. Let's move into the relevant literature: *The Road*, *28 Days Later*, *Shaun of the Dead*, and *Zombieland*.

Body paragraph 1

- I. *Evidence:* No bikes in The Road. C'mon Viggo...
- II. *Analysis:* Bikes would have logically helped a lot
 - a. There was no fuel
 - b. They had to move a great distance
 - c. Bikes are quiet
- III. *Transition:* Same as in Shaun of the Dead.
(etc...)

Tips

The outline can come at really any point in your writing process. Maybe you want to begin with a list of ideas like this and fill it in as you research. Maybe you want to form your thesis after doing a lot of research. Maybe you write a simple draft first and then do a reverse outline from that. **Remember this:** your outline is something you want to revisit; it is a guide for your work, but something that you can reshape as your work progresses. That's called a recursive system. It's smart. Be smart and use it!