

# How to Write a Thesis Outline

Phys. 499 Fa15

## WRITING YOUR THESIS OUTLINE

NOTHING SAYS "I'M ALMOST DONE" TO YOUR ADVISOR/  
SPOUSE/PARENTS LIKE PRETENDING YOU HAVE A PLAN

**STEP 1** Aim for a respectable number of chapters:

### THESIS OUTLINE

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

chapter #s

- 5 = "That's IT??"
- 6-7 = "Not bad"
- 8+ = "Are you crazy??"

**STEP 2** Fill in the "freebies":

### THESIS OUTLINE

1. INTRODUCTION
2. LIT REVIEW
3. METHODOLOGY
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
7. CONCLUSIONS

You're half way done!

**STEP 3** Make up titles for the "meat" chapters:

6. LIT REVIEW
3. METHODOLOGY
4. (THAT STUFF YOU DID YOUR FIRST YEAR)
5. (STUFF YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DOING NOW)
6. (MAKE STUFF UP)
7. CONCLUSIONS

(It'll be years before you actually have to work on that later chapter, and by then your thesis topic will have changed anyway)

**STEP 4** Voilà! You just bought yourself another two years



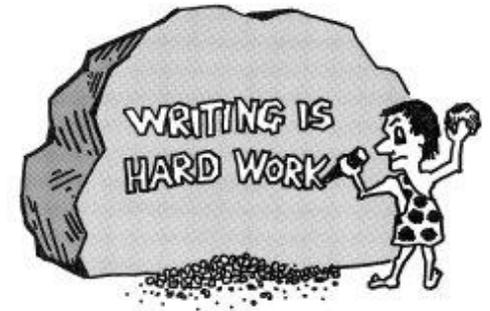
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# This is your (ever-growing) platform

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*We recommend the sections:*

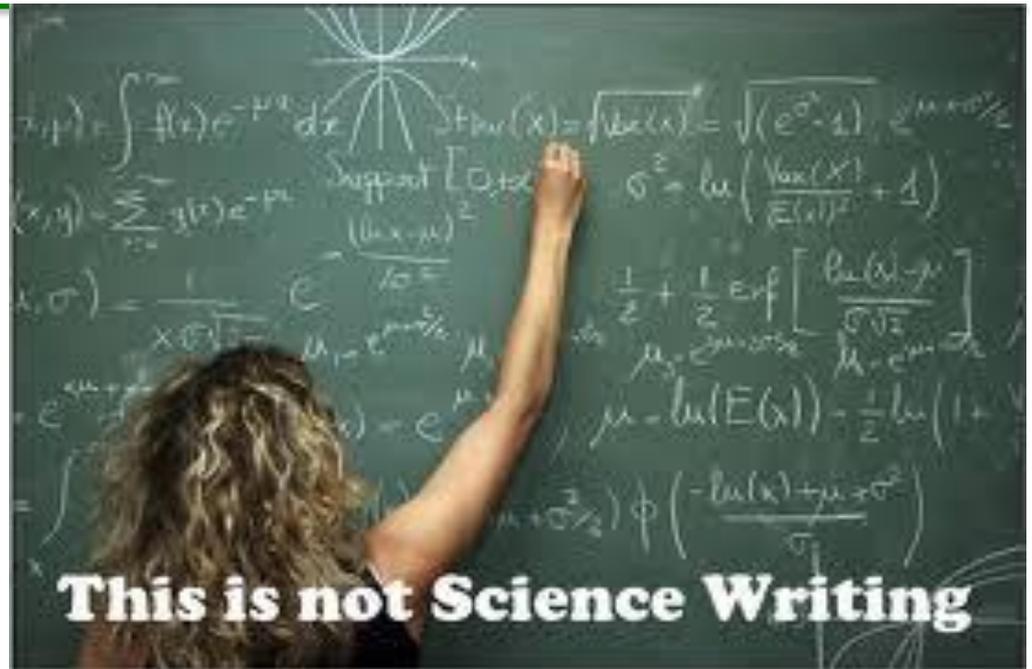
- I. Introduction and Background
- II. Methods
- III. Results
- IV. Discussion
- V. Summary and/or Conclusions
- VI. Acknowledgements
- VII. References



- Some papers are written in just this form

# What the OUTLINE is Not!

- A paper
- A paragraph
- Set in stone
- EVER to be discarded



***It is a TEMPLATE and GUIDE for how to divide and conquer your thesis!***

# Your Outline Homework

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1. Write a list of the sections for your thesis
  - Give this file a name, e.g.  
“YourName Senior Thesis 0915a.\*\*\*”
  - This file will grow into your thesis – you must submit your homework using this entire file
    - Each submission should have a new version number: 0915b, 0915a, etc.
2. Write a title and sentence for each subsection
  - e.g. **Section II.1 Apparatus** The important parts of the apparatus include the oscilloscope and the cryostat; the unique part of the apparatus is the sample holder.

# Introductory Comments about Writing

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- We recommend that you start, e.g. your Project Summary Report (due in 2 weeks) with an outline
  - This outline should include a draft topic sentence for each paragraph
  - Paragraphs almost always have a single topic
  - There should be “connective tissue” that links the paragraphs together
    - **Be simple**
    - **Be direct: say what you mean**
    - **Explain, but be succinct**
    - **Get outside of your own head**

# Introductory Comments about Writing

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- Revisions are (integral, key, unavoidable, necessary) parts of the writing process
  - Update your outline/thesis file often – e.g. as you think of where the important plots and tables go
  - Be sure to save as a new version – then you can always go back. **Back up your file(s) – regularly!**
  - Be realistic. Make sure the most important information is included first.

# Final Note – the Outline is the Foundation of the ENTIRE THESIS

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- The better and more complete the outline, the easier it is to write a strong, cohesive thesis.



Please do **not** fall behind: The thesis must be a continual work in progress - you cannot do it the night before, or even a week!