

OUTLINING A RESEARCH PROJECT

First, make a rough outline to guide your research and thinking:

INTRODUCTION

Thesis statement:

DEFINITION/BACKGROUND/METHODOLOGY SECTION

Key terms:

Historical context:

EVIDENCE SECTION

Most important claims backed by source evidence:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

OTHER VIEWPOINTS SECTION

Arguments against/disputes with some of your claims:

1a. _____

2a. _____

Common ground/Concessions:

1b. _____

2b. _____

Refutation/explanation with additional evidence

1c. _____

2c. _____

CONCLUSION

Then, make a *functional outline* to guide your writing.

A **functional outline** is a sort of annotated outline—not just a list of headings and subheadings but a clear indication of the purpose of each section—and even each paragraph—of your essay. The key to the functional outline is understanding the difference between what a sentence/paragraph/ passage *says* and what that sentence/paragraph/passage *does*:

SAYS= the actual content of the section (ideas, quotations, statistics)

DOES= the purpose of that content at that point in the essay

Use your rough outline to map out each paragraph you think will be necessary to substantiate the claims of those sections. Then, explain what each section or paragraph of your essay will say and do. For each section, you should include:

1. A **topic sentence** that could be the first line of that section or paragraph (the beginning of what your paragraph *says*)
2. The **purpose** of the paragraph or section (what it *does* for your argument)

Example:

Paper's Thesis: The practice of Buddhism requires individual meditation and discipline, not group bonding or community worship.

DEFINITION SECTION

Paragraph 1

Topic sentence: It's important to trace the advent of Buddhist retreats and group practices in America in order to ask why these group practices might not be as effective as individual practice.

Does: Offers preview of terms and historical dates needed to understand argument.

Paragraph 2

Topic sentence: Participation in group meditation retreats is growing, both among serious practitioners and those new to Buddhism.

Does: Defines *dathun* and offers statistics to show the increased interest in group work.

Paragraph 3

Topic sentence: Group retreats like dathuns sound good in theory, but the way they really take shape can be very counterproductive to cultivating an inner practice.

Does: Compares current offerings at American mediation centers, such as Shambhala, in order to show the wide discrepancy in what group practice actually entails.

