Outlining a Research Article: An Exercise in Reading Comprehension

You may need to summarize research articles as a student, particularly when working on annotated bibliographies and literature reviews. Outlining a research article after you read can facilitate a better understanding of the information. It can also help you prioritize the article’s important points for your summary.

This resource contains an explanation of what to include in your article outline and an example outline.

What to Include in Your Outline

The outline should record:

- **the reference for the article**
  - The reference ensures you will be able to locate the article if you need to reread it. Keeping the reference with your notes also helps minimize the risk of accidentally plagiarizing.

- **the purpose of the study described in the article**
  - The purpose establishes context for the information that follows.

- **major points that you have identified, along with minor points** (the details that elaborate on and support those major points).
  
  A point is major when
  - It involves original research or conclusions by the authors of the article you read, rather than other authors cited within the article
  - It expresses the results of the study that was conducted
  - It is something you would tell a friend who asks, “What is the article about?”

- **anything else that is pertinent, such as the study’s methodology or limitations**
  - The limitations in particular can help set up your critical analysis of the article.

Remember that this outline is for you, as a stepping stone to summary writing. Compile the outline in a way that works for you. For example, you do not need to use complete sentences or even a linear structure. You can draw the major points as circles, if that creates a stronger representation of the information for you.

See How to Read a Research Article for more on the individual sections of an article and how to navigate them.
Example Outline

Below is an article outline that you can use as a model when crafting your own. In this outline, the student has chosen to focus on the results of the study (Major Point 1) and the authors’ recommendations based on those results (Major Points 2 and 3).

Article


**Outline of Article’s Major Points**

I. *Purpose of the Study*: To study college instructors’ perceptions of the biggest APA problem areas for their students. Based on study, identify instructional strategies and resources to help in those areas.

II. *Major Point 1*: Properly crediting sources in APA style is biggest concern.
   a. 135 college faculty surveyed via Likert scale
   b. In-text citations, reference page, and direct quotes have most errors (according to faculty)

III. *Major Point 2*: Teaching strategies can help students learn APA style.
   a. Activities such as classroom assessment, peer review, error correction, quiz
   b. Instructor feedback
   c. Rubrics with APA as a category

IV. *Major Point 3*: Supplemental resources can help students learn APA style.
   a. Purdue OWL website
   b. APA style blog