

Three Outline Stages: How to Develop an Argument Plan

Outlining is pretty rigid, right? Wrong! This handout shows how outlines can flex and bend for your purposes. Change your outlines as your research develops and your ideas improve.

STAGE 1 – Bullet point outline to guide research

Consider the main questions, topics, and issues implied in the assignment design. This outline is designed to guide your “pre-writing,” or idea generating, stage of the writing process.

A bullet-point outline might look something like this:

- I. Is it truly possible to develop more than 150 friendships?
- II. How does the concept of “Facebook friends” influence our cultural understanding of friendships?
- III. What accounts for people maintaining fewer friendships as they age?

STAGE 2 – Outlining main arguments or claims to organize research material

Here, the goal is INTEGRATION of source material, to show the “conversation” that is taking place about the broader issue. Consider numbering your sources to more easily organize your sources according to the topic/claim they address.

- I. People can only maintain about 150 friendships
 - #1: “The Dunbar Number, From the Guru of Social Networks”
 - #4: “Why We Live – Counting The People Your Life Impacts”
 - #3: “Centrality in Children’s Best Friend Networks: The Role of Social Behaviour”
- II. Not all of someone’s Facebook “friends” truly qualify as actual friends to that person
 - #4: “The Quagmire of Social Media Friendships”
 - #5: “6 New Facts about Facebook”
- III. People maintain fewer social media friendships as they age
 - #2: “6 New Facts about Facebook”

STAGE 3 – Outline to guide drafting process

Working thesis:

Although social media has encouraged the proliferation of digital “friendships,” humans can only maintain a fixed amount of meaningful relationships.

- I. Humans can only maintain roughly 150 friendships at a time.
 - #1 “For Dunbar, there’s a simple explanation for this: In the same way that human beings can’t breathe underwater or run the 100-meter dash in 2.5 seconds or see microwaves with the naked eye, most

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cannot maintain many more than 150 meaningful relationships. Cognitively, we're just not built for it" (Bennett).

#4 "...the number of people you would not feel embarrassed about joining uninvited for a drink if you happened to bump into them in a bar" (Vital).

#3 "Social confidence, social desirability, and friendship quality predicted changes in the indicators of centrality in best friend networks over time" (Betts and Stiller).

II. A person's number of "friends" on Facebook or other social media generally far outstrips how many true friendships they actually maintain.

#4 "...a friend is someone who cares about you. Not just the fact that you exist, but the fact they contribute to your existence and the quality of your existence" (Silver 446).

#5 "Among adult Facebook users, the average (mean) number of friends is 338" (Smith).

III. As people age, the number of social media friendships they boast more accurately reflect how many true friendships they maintain in their everyday life.

#2 "Younger users tend to have significantly larger friend networks than older users: 27% of 18-29 year old Facebook users have more than 500 friends in their network, while 72% of users age 65+ have 100 friends or fewer" (Smith).

Conclusion:

- To appreciate the bond between friends, it's important to draw a distinction between Facebook friendships and actual friendships
- It takes more to foster a true friendship than just clicking a button on a social media website
- Humans unable to maintain more than 150 friendships so those relationships more valuable and unique