

Using Generative AI to Teach Outlining and Organizational Thinking

For these two exercises I use Chat GPT 3.5 (currently the free version) but other LLMs can provide similar feedback. Don't hesitate to reach out if you have questions or want to share other ideas.

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Lesson 1: Generating a reverse outline to highlight organizational problems

Note—For this exercise students will input a draft they've created into Chat GPT, so if they have concerns about privacy or otherwise feeding their intellectual property into the LLM, you'll want to provide them with an alternative.

To help students who've already drafted an essay see possible gaps in their logic and organizational techniques, have them provide the following prompt and then paste their draft into the window.

Create an outline based on the existing organizational structure in the following essay. |



ChatGPT may produce inaccurate information about people, places, or facts. [ChatGPT August 3 Version](#)

GPT 3.5 generally does a good job of simply laying out in outline format what a student has written. The partial example below is GPT's outline version of an approximately 750-word draft about how to become a lead guitar player for a rock band. In reviewing GPT's rendition of his work, the student immediately saw that what he *thought* he was doing in each paragraph "wasn't really getting across."



I. Introduction

- A. Opening with a guitar riff from "Smoke on the Water"
- B. The intrigue of guitar playing
- C. The misconception of difficulty in guitar playing
- D. The aspiration to become a lead guitar player

II. Step 1: Acquiring a Guitar

- A. Acoustic vs. Electric
- B. Benefits of starting with acoustic
- C. Building finger calluses
- D. Choosing between an instructor and a booklet for learning

III. Step 2: Learning Chords

- A. Importance of chord fundamentals
- B. Major and minor chords as essential basics

This exercise is especially helpful when asking students to focus on revision rather than sentence-level editing. Writers can see their ideas summarized by an outside source, so they're not distracted by their own "mistakes."

This lesson is also effective for helping students recognize where transitions are needed and how to craft them for an audience.

Lesson 2: Feeding a brainstorm into ChatGPT to generate organizational options

Students can use GPT or a similar program to practice organizational techniques. First, have students do a guided brainstorm where they come up with a bunch of related ideas. Then have them input their list. The example below is for a speech about owning exotic pets:

help me outline a speech about exotic pets that discusses some of the following points: The danger of some exotics (to owners and to others), the expense of owning exotic pets, the problem of some pets being released into the wild, the fun of having a pet no one else has, the issue of what to feed them, taking them to the vet, teaching your pet to talk, some birds live up to 70 years, some pets are nocturnal



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The outline the LLM came up with in response is nothing brilliant (e.g. "Thesis statement: Today, we will explore the fascinating world of exotic pets, considering both the joys and challenges they bring into our lives.") But by examining and evaluating what is effective about the outline, what's boring, and what seems out of place, students are beginning from a different place than they would if they wrote an outline from scratch.



I. Introduction

- A. Attention-grabbing opening about exotic pets
- B. Brief overview of the points to be discussed
- C. Thesis statement: "Today, we will explore the fascinating world of exotic pets, considering both the joys and challenges they bring into our lives."

II. The Danger of Some Exotic Pets

- A. Examples of dangerous exotic pets
- B. Risks to owners and others
- C. The importance of responsible ownership and education

III. The Expense of Owning Exotic Pets

These lessons help students see LLMs—and outlining itself—as a tool to promote clearer thinking and a way to more objectively view and read their own work.