

ORGANIZING TOPICS FOR AN OUTLINE

Suppose that in the process of collecting information for a biology term paper on termites, you have collected a stack of note cards. Below is a list of the “slugs” or brief descriptive labels you have placed on those note cards. For each “slug” you might have either one or several notes.

Study the list below and arrange the items in a logical plan. First, group like topics together. Then arrange the groups of topics in a sequence that would be a reasonable way of presenting the information to your readers. Finally, arrange the topics within each group in a logical sequence.

1. Life span of the queen
2. Size, color and ancestry of termites
3. Basic differences between termite and human societies
4. Ejecting a sticky fluid on an enemy by termite soldiers
5. Fighting by the soldiers with spurs
6. Description of the soldier termite
7. The termite as a destructive pest
8. The founding of new colonies
9. The habitat of the termite
10. Summoning help by soldiers during a fight
11. The composition of termite society
12. The termite as a helpful scavenger
13. Economic relationship of the termite to humans
14. The size of the queen
15. The building of nests by the workers
16. The fertility of the queen
17. Reproductives: the king and queen
18. Basic similarities between termite and human societies
19. Grooming other termites by the workers
20. Feeding other termites by the workers
21. Crushing the enemy with pincers (soldiers)
22. Protective mechanisms used by soldiers
23. General description of termites
24. Description of workers
25. Gathering food by the workers
26. Duties of workers
27. Blocking holes against enemies (soldiers)
28. Caring for fungus gardens (workers)
29. Soldiers
30. Workers
31. Termite society and human society

Remember: the major categories in an outline are usually the more general; the details and contributing points that develop them are usually more specific.

Adapted from Doris Wilcox Gilbert. *Study in Depth*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ. Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966, p. 112.
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