

# how to use OUTLINING

## THE 5 W's — OF — OUTLINING

### WHO

Identify who the passage is taking about. To use history as an example, the “Who” can be grand scale, like the Byzantine Empire, or specific, like Socrates. The “Who” essentially describes the main focus of the passage. For chapters that cover many important historical figures and cultures, this “Who” can vary by chapter, section or even paragraph. When in doubt, write down any names you see in the text and describe who they are or what they mean. Is this the name of a person or civilization? Is this a name of a disease, e.g. Black Plague, or weapon? Experiment with a few passages and see how the perspective changes as you move through each of the 5 W's.

### WHAT

The “What” helps you define your “Who,” “When,” and “Where.” Same questions: What are the big picture ideas, central themes or plot points? What is the goal of the passage? What questions come to mind when you read this passage? What does the chapter ask of the reader?

### WHEN

When did the action take place? Times, dates, periods of time or even moments in history can fall under this category. If the paragraph or passage includes a “when,” you know that's important information to retain.

### WHERE

Similar to the “When,” the “Where” indicates any locations that the passage mentions, or any contextual clues that might be significant. For example, it's important to understand the setting, while in history it's critical to know which location (i.e. country, county, territory, etc.) the text is describing. Without this first step it's difficult to understand where to place the information you are learning about. Don't underestimate the power in understanding Geography.

### WHY

The “Why” might seem like an obvious piece to this puzzle, but it is an absolutely essential member of the 5 W's. After cultivating a surface level understanding of a concept, it's important to delve deeper. The “Why” forces you to question the text, to seek out associations and connections both inside and outside of the classroom. The “Why” starts with the questions and explanations that you write in your notes. How can you take your topic further? How does this chapter relate to the rest?

**TAKEAWAY** If you feel stuck while outlining a textbook, try reading the summary or discussion points and questions at the back of the chapter. You can also read the first and last paragraph of the chapter or section for clues. Use these tools to guide you through the text. This will help you sift through superfluous information. The goal of outlining is to extract two to three main points for every paragraph.