

Some suggestions for constructing SSA outlines:

1. **Use descriptive section titles.** Generic titles such as “current condition” or “resiliency” are not useful to readers. Instead, consider using descriptive titles such as “Tinian monarch numbers and distribution” or “Resiliency depends largely on forest habitat.”
2. **Keep section titles brief.** Lengthy section titles make a table of contents difficult to read, cause the formatting of a document to look clunky, and create confusion for the reader. We recognize that this advice can conflict with point #1, “use descriptive section titles.” We suggest that you balance the reader’s need for information with a reader’s difficulty processing too much information or information that is too complex.

You can achieve this balance by repeating key topics such as the 3Rs with more descriptive subtitles (e.g. “Redundancy: Three Populations, Three Different Factors”) and by using parallel structures to show equivalency (e.g. “Nest building,” “Feeding during brooding,” “Fledgling behavior,” and “Foraging behavior;” see point #3).

3. **Use parallel structure.** Section titles disorient the reader if they are not in parallel structure. If several titles within a subsection consist of an adjective and a noun, all titles in that subsection should consist of an adjective and a noun (e.g. “Morphological description,” “Taxonomic classification” or “Morphology,” “Taxonomy” NOT “Morphological description,” “Taxonomy”).
4. **Section titles do not replace narrative content.** The section title serves as a supplement to the text; it does not replace it. When writing the first sentence of a new section, assume that the section title does not exist.
5. **Use Word’s Style and Navigation Features.** Microsoft Word allows you to assign style designations to titles of sections and subsections such as Heading 1, 2, 3, etc. When you do so, these headings are visible in a Navigation pane within the document; then, you can create and update a table of contents automatically. For instructions on how to use these features, please visit [Microsoft Support. “How to create a table of contents by marking text in Word.”](#)



Species Status Assessments—Writing Outlines

A living outline is a tremendous help to the writer who wishes to stay organized and keep a document on track. Visit it, use it, and revise it frequently, as you decide how to organize your raw material and again as you write the sections of your document. Make notes on your outline, being as descriptive as possible about what to include in each section, ensuring it connects with the logic you are tracking throughout the document, and reviewing it with your team both before starting to write and as the document develops.