Sample Outline for a Critical Essay

The following is a basic outline of a critical essay, the kind that might be written in a composition, literature, or film class. in this case, the writer is analyzing the meaning of particular symbols in a short story and film.

Keep in mind that this is only one kind of possible organization; there are several ways to structure an essay effectively. Outlines can also vary in the amount of detail. Always check with your instructor if you are unsure about the organization of your essay.

Title: Symbols of Freedom in Stephen King's story "Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption" and Frank Darabont's film The Shawshank Redemption.
Thesis Statement: In their different versions of Shawshank Redemption, author Stephen King and director Frank Darabont make distinctions between freedom and captivity using a bird, a library, and a poster as symbols of freedom and justice.

I. Introduction
- The theme of freedom
- Contrast freedom with the idea of unfair imprisonment
- A bird, a library, and a poster as symbols of the human spirit, longing for community, and rebirth

II. The bird as the struggle of Andy Dufesne's human spirit
- Bird as a universal symbol of freedom
- "Caging" the bird is a metaphor for Andy's false imprisonment
- Jake's different fates in the book and the film: warning and hope

III. The library as a symbol for community
- The library as a place of freedom within the prison
- Represents Andy's connection with his own intellectual society
- The library as a connection between Andy and the other prisoners

IV. The poster as a symbol of rebirth
- The women on the posters represent the "outside"
- The posters guard and protect Andy's struggle for freedom
- Andy must go through the poster to escape
- The sewage pipe Andy crawls through is like a birth canal
- Rita Hayworth is like a "mother" to Andy's new life

V. Conclusion
- Andy's freedom was stolen
- Andy "steals" his freedom back
- Andy's escape is the ultimate triumph of the human spirit over injustice and inhumanity