Outlines An outline is a way of organizing information that shows the relationships among ideas. An outline can guide writers to present ideas clearly and can help readers understand the organization of information.

- Informal outlines or early plans An informal outline, also known as an early plan, does not have a set form. You simply sort your ideas or facts into groups and arrange the groups in order. First, ask yourself: Which items belong together? What do they have in common? Which items don’t fit anywhere? Then, give each group a heading that shows how the items in it are related. Next, arrange your information in a way that will make sense to your readers: chronological order, spatial order, logical order, order of importance, or another order that works. (See also Compositions on page 977.) Some papers will combine more than one type of order. Here is an informal outline about bicycle touring.

- Formal outlines A formal outline is a highly structured, clearly labeled writing plan. It has a set pattern, using letters and numbers to label main headings, subheadings and details. An outline can use either topics (words and phrases) or complete sentences for each item. Here is a portion of a formal outline about bicycle touring.

Title: Bicycle Touring

Thesis statement: If you are interested in bicycle touring, you need to make some specific preparations involving your bike, yourself, your clothing, and your route.

I. Your bike
   A. Type of bike
   B. Condition of the bike
   C. Equipment
      1. Map
      2. Light
      3. Kits
         a. Bicycle-repair kit
         b. First-aid kit
   4. Saddlebags
   5. Water container

II. Your physical condition
   A. Exercise program
      1. Muscles
      2. Endurance
   B. Goal: 10–15 miles

Bicycle Touring

Preparing your bike
   — condition
   — equipment

Preparing yourself
   — exercise

Preparing clothing
   — weather-appropriate
   — safety gear

Preparing a route
   — miles per day
   — terrain