

What is an Outline ?

An outline is a general plan or map that provides a skeletal structure for a piece of writing, showing the main ideas and their supporting details in a logical order. It serves as a roadmap during the writing process, helping to organize thoughts and ensure a cohesive flow, and can also refer to the outer line of a shape. Outlines can be traditional, using a hierarchical structure of Roman numerals, capital letters, and numbers, or more flexible, depending on the project's needs.

Purpose and function

- Organizes ideas: An outline helps you to structure your thoughts and see the relationship between topics, subtopics, and supporting points before you start writing.
- Plans content: It creates a roadmap for your writing, guiding the logical progression of your arguments or narrative.
- Ensures coherence: By laying out the main ideas, it helps you connect them to your thesis statement or overall purpose.
- Provides a framework: It serves as a "frame" or "foundation" from which you can build your sentences and paragraphs.
- Aids in revision: Outlines can be helpful during the editing process to rethink, reshape, and edit your work.

Types of outlines

- Traditional outline: Uses a hierarchy of Roman numerals (I, II), capital letters (A, B), and numbers (1, 2) to organize main topics and sub-points.
- Alphanumeric outline: A specific type of traditional outline that uses a combination of Roman numerals, capital letters, numbers, and lowercase letters (I, A, 1, a).

When to use an outline

- Before writing: Most people use an outline as a pre-writing tool to plan before they begin drafting.
- During writing: An outline can be developed or modified as you research and write.
- After writing: A "reverse outline" can be created after writing a first draft to help you understand and refine its structure.