

Organization/Reverse Outline Workshop Handout

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Outlines or reverse outlines are useful tools for the writing process. They can help keep you on point when you are writing as well as help you organize your paper BEFORE you write it, in addition to diagnosing problems after a draft has been completed.

Activity (option 1): Reverse Outline

Take a look at your most recent assignment. You are going to look closely at each paragraph to ensure clarity of content, logical flow, and presence of necessary elements. Answer these questions in order to evaluate this.

For your introduction:

- Evaluate the introductory information: does it grab your attention
Does it introduce you to the topic sufficiently?
- Identify your thesis: Does it answer the prompt?
Is it specific, debatable, and interesting?

For each Paragraph do the following:

- A. Write down the main idea of the paragraph in a simple sentence. (Make sure there is only one main idea. If there are two or more significant ideas, create a new paragraph. **Be wary of the word "and" in this sentence.** This often means that there is more than one idea present).
- B. Write one or two sentences explaining how your paragraph relates to your thesis. If you don't have such sentences in your paragraph, consider adding them.
- C. Write down your transition word or phrase.
Each paragraph should have a transition sentence. There are two styles: 1.) wrap up the idea of the paragraph and relate the idea back to your thesis. Begin the next paragraph with a key word/phrase/concept to signal transition into the next idea with a topic sentence. 2.) End your paragraph with a segue to the next idea and begin the next paragraph with a topic sentence.
- D. Briefly assess the level of detail in the paragraph, adequacy of supporting information, and length of paragraph. Note if these need work or are sufficient; be specific.

For Conclusion:

1. Do you **restate** your thesis (not copy and paste) and/or bring your reader back through your explanation/argument?
2. Are you left with something to think about/ did you connect the argument to the broader implications?

Consider the outline you made. Do you need to change the order of any paragraphs? Do you need to move any sections? If the logic or topic of one section includes information important to an earlier argument **or** concepts are used that are not defined until later in the paper, you may need to consider rearranging your paragraph order.



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Activity (option 2): Outline

Take a look at your most recent assignment. You are going to look closely at each paragraph to ensure clarity of content, logical flow, and presence of necessary elements. Answer these questions in order to evaluate this.

For your introduction:

Start with the broadest piece of information you can think of that is still relevant to the topic; this can be a date, historical/contextual information, or a brief biographical statement about the author. Alternatively, you can begin with something catchy or interesting (called a “hook”).

Begin your Thesis:

Theses generally have three parts: a position or answer to a question, specifics about how that position will be supported or explained, and a ‘so what?’ that explains the importance of the argument. Your thesis should answer the prompt and be debatable, specific, and interesting.

For each element of your thesis do the following:

- A. Write down the main idea of the paragraph in a simple sentence. Consider using that as your topic sentence. (Make sure there is only one main idea. If there are two or more significant ideas, create a new paragraph. **Be wary of the word “and” in this sentence.** This often means that there is more than one idea present).
- B. Write one or two sentences explaining how your paragraph relates to your thesis.
- C. What details can you use to develop the idea of the paragraph? Can you use quotes/sources to aid your argument? If so: what quotes from which sources?
- D. At the end of your paragraph you should have a transition sentence. There are two styles: 1.) wrap up the idea of the paragraph and relate the idea back to your thesis. Begin the next paragraph with a key word to signal transition into the next idea with a topic sentence. 2.) End your paragraph on a segue into the next idea and begin the next paragraph with a topic sentence.

Conclusion:

Restate your thesis (not copy and paste) and/or bring your reader back through your explanation/argument and end your paper with something for your reader to think about, this is usually done by connecting the argument to its broader implications.

Consider the outline you made. Do you need to change the order of any paragraphs? Do you need to move any sections? If the logic or topic of one section includes information important to an earlier argument **or** concepts are used that are not defined until later in the paper, you may need to consider rearranging your paragraph order.



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Evaluate Introduction:

Thesis:

Paragraph 1:

A.

B.

C.

D.

Paragraph 2:

A.

B.

C.

D.

Paragraph 3:

A.

B.

C.

D.

Conclusion:

Final Thoughts:



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