

Reverse Outlining

Revision

One of the most important parts of the writing process is revision, the stage where you rework your draft's global concerns (GLOCs): focus, clarity, organization, and persuasiveness. Reverse outlining is a great tool to use in figuring out where your draft needs work.

You're probably familiar with the concept of outlining as a pre-writing strategy—when you outline, you write down all the sections and subsections of your paper in an organized, numbered hierarchy, which you can then use as a blueprint in producing your first draft.

When you create a reverse outline, you do the same thing, only backwards: you start with an existing draft, and try to create an outline that represents its sections and its major points. Doing so allows you to see where your organization doesn't make sense, where you have unexplained "leaps" in your logic, and where you haven't constructed effective paragraphs.

There are a couple of ways to create a reverse outline. One involves creating a sequential outline, and the other involves making a table.

Reverse Outlining via Sequential Outline

1. **Look** at your current draft and read each paragraph carefully – and separately – for purpose and content.
2. **Write** in the margins of your draft what you see as the main point in your paragraph. If your paragraph seems to have two main points, write them both in the margin of the paper.
3. **Transfer** these "main points" into an outline format on a separate sheet of paper.
4. **Examine** your outline for several important things:
 - a. Fluidity of development: ask yourself: Do my points follow logically from each other? Could I make the flow smoother by moving certain paragraphs to different places in my argument?
 - b. Separation of points: Do any of my paragraphs make more than one point? If so, how do I separate them into different paragraphs? Do the paragraphs belong near each other? Or should they be separated to improve the flow of my argument?
 - c. Inclusion of important elements: Does my essay miss any significant points or connections that are necessary for its development? Where should I put these "missing links"?
5. And finally, **make revisions** as necessary, first with the outline, and then with the draft.

Reverse Outlining via Table

To use the tabling approach to reverse outlining, first number your draft's paragraphs from beginning to end. Then use the following table (or draw columns on a separate sheet) to record what each paragraph "does" and "says."

In the "does" column, write down the paragraph's function, the job it is supposed to do in your draft ("proves that some evidence indicates heightened self-esteem among home-schooled, pre-teen girls;" "creates a logical transition from discussion of self-esteem to discussion of body image").

In the "says" column, write down each paragraph's main point(s). As with the sequential outlining approach, you'll want to keep an eye out for paragraphs that have more than one main point and paragraphs whose "says" don't seem to match their "does;" that is, paragraphs that are not functioning in the way you intended them to function.

When you're done, you can also check out your paper's organization and logical flow by reading the "does" column in order from top to bottom. Are the points presented in the most logical order? Do you see gaps in reasoning, or places where you suddenly switch tracks without explanation or transitions? Also, how can you revise paragraphs so that what they say makes them *do* what they're supposed to do more effectively?

<u>Paragraph Number</u>	<u>Does</u>	<u>Says</u>