

APSU Writing Center

Reverse Outlining

Reverse Outlining

Reverse outlining is the process of creating an outline **after** you've written a draft. It helps you quickly visualize your paper's structure and identify areas to revise. For every paragraph, write its main idea in a few words or one sentence.

Benefits of Reverse Outlining

- Spot missing information or unsupported claims
- Eliminate irrelevant or repetitive content
- Strengthen connections to your thesis
- Improve paragraph focus and development
- Reorganize ideas for stronger flow

How to Create a Reverse Outline

Check Your Thesis Statement

- Summarize your entire paper in one sentence to see if it aligns with your thesis statement.

Check Paragraph Focus & Relevance

- Number each paragraph and write a one-sentence summary of its main idea.
- **Questions to answer:**
 - Does the paragraph have a clear main idea?
 - Are there multiple ideas packed into one paragraph?
 - Does the paragraph support the thesis?
 - Is the topic sentence strong and specific?

Check the Essay's Organization

- Review the order and structure of your paragraphs to ensure your ideas flow logically and support your thesis effectively.

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Check the Essay's Organization

- **Questions to answer:**
 - Are similar topics grouped together?
 - Would a different structure work better (chronological, cause/effect, strongest to weakest)?
 - Are any key ideas missing?
 - Is one idea over-discussed while others are underdeveloped?
 - Do your transitions help readers follow your logic?

Reverse Outlining While Reading

- After each paragraph, write a 4–10 word summary in the margin or on a separate page.
- **Questions to answer:**
 - What's the main point of this paragraph?
 - Do I agree or disagree?
 - How does this relate to my research or argument?
 - Can I use this organizational structure in my own writing?

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Reverse Outlining Template

Write the main idea of each paragraph in 1 sentence.

Paragraph 1:

Paragraph 2:

Paragraph 3:

Paragraph 4:

Paragraph 5:

Does each paragraph clearly support the thesis?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Is the order of ideas logical and effective?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Are there any gaps or redundant points?

☐ Gaps:

☐ Redundancies:

Does each topic sentence reflect the main idea of the paragraph?

☐ Yes

☐ No



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References

George Mason University Writing Center. (2024). *Reverse outlining*. George Mason University.

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