



Reverse Outlining

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

Instructor: _____

Course _____

About This DLA

Important Note

All the activities (4) in the DLA must be completed in their entirety before meeting with a tutor and receiving credit. Where indicated, complete your work on this sheet. If your instructor wants evidence of this completed DLA, return this form to him or her with the tutor's signature included.

Learning Outcome

Students will be introduced to the reverse outlining strategy and will be able to create a reverse outline.

Activities (approximately 1 hour)

Read the information, complete the activities that follow, and be prepared to discuss your answers when you meet with a tutor.

Understanding the Reverse Outline

What comes to mind when you think of an outline? Most writers recall that an outline is done before a paper is written to help organize thoughts and ideas. A reverse outline, however, is done after the first draft of the paper is complete. A reverse outline is a helpful revising tool that highlights problem areas in organization, thesis support, and flow of the paper. It serves as an effective starting point for the revision process. That being said, it is important that your reverse outline be done as early as possible in the revision process, right after the first draft is written, so you won't have to rework the organization of the entire paper later down the line.

How do I create a reverse outline?

1. Place a number next to each paragraph, including the introduction and conclusion.
2. On a separate sheet of paper, write #1 and list the main point (or points) of the first paragraph.
3. Repeat for each subsequent paragraph of the paper.
4. Look at your outline to see an overview of your paper or article and its main points.

How do I analyze my reverse outline?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are the paragraphs properly focused or are there multiple ideas within a paragraph? If you have difficulty summing up a paragraph in one or two sentences, there are probably multiple ideas within that paragraph.

- Are there extraneous ideas within a paragraph that can be deleted or moved to another, more pertinent paragraph? Are there unnecessary repetitions throughout the paper?
- When you look at the paper as a whole, does the organization of the paper reflect what you promised in your intro/thesis?
- When you look at the paper as a whole, does the logic of the argument flow well from paragraph to paragraph? Is there important information that should occur earlier in the paper?

Reverse Outline Example*

Claim: Deinstitutionalizing mental patients in the late twentieth-century led to transforming the “hobo” to the “homeless person.”

Paragraph 1: Introduction

Paragraph 2: The image of the hobo before World War II

Paragraph 3: The image of the homeless person today

Paragraph 4: The effects of deinstitutionalization

Paragraph 5: A history of deinstitutionalization

Paragraph 6: A history of the depression; how the depression is both different and similar to the time period of deinstitutionalization; incorrect beliefs about the causes and timeframe of deinstitutionalization

Paragraph 7: The Reagan administration’s policies on deinstitutionalization

Paragraph 8: The realities of life as a “homeless person” contrasted to the romantic notions of “riding the rails”

Paragraph 9: Conclusion

**Duke University Writing Studio. March 2009. <https://twp.duke.edu/sites/twp.duke.edu/files/file-attachments/reverse-outline.original.pdf>*

Now apply the following questions:

Are the paragraphs properly focused or are there multiple ideas within a paragraph?

- Paragraph 6 contains multiple ideas, too many for a single paragraph. Each of the ideas can be separated into different paragraphs.

Are there extraneous ideas within a paragraph that can be deleted or moved to another, more pertinent paragraph?

- Paragraphs 2 and 3 appear to have similar ideas to Paragraph 8. The ideas can be combined and moved closer together to strengthen the flow of the paper.
- Paragraph 7 appears to be extraneous unless the Reagan administration’s policies on deinstitutionalization can be connected to the thesis claim. If so, the Paragraph 7 can be included in the history of deinstitutionalization in Paragraph 5.
- Similarly, the history of the depression in Paragraph 6 is too broad a topic and should be clarified to focus on the hobo during the depression.

When you look at the paper as a whole, does the organization of the paper reflect what you promised in your intro/thesis? Does the logic of the argument flow well from paragraph to paragraph? Is there important information that should occur earlier in the paper?

- The claim of the paper is that deinstitutionalization has led to transforming the “hobo” to the “homeless person.” The claim emphasizes deinstitutionalization, but the paper begins with description of the “hobo.” Either the paper should begin with a discussion of deinstitutionalization or the claim should be reworked.
- With regard to the flow of the paper, history should come before effects. The history of deinstitutionalization in Paragraph 5 should be placed before the effects of deinstitutionalization in Paragraph 4. Similarly, the history of the depression in Paragraph 6 should be moved up.

After you analyze your reverse outline by answering the questions above, you can begin the revision process to ensure that your ideas are properly organized, clearly focused, and supportive of your thesis.

Additionally, when trying to understand and summarize a difficult text, a reverse outline allows you to do so easily. It requires you to put the difficult concepts into your own words as you summarize each paragraph. After all paragraphs are summarized, you can review your notes to see the overall point of the text.

**Handout adapted from Monmouth University Writing Center’s Handout “Reverse Outlining”*

Activities

Check off each box once you have completed the activity.

1. Reverse Outline Review

What are the steps you should follow to create a reverse outline?

What is the purpose of a reverse outline?

2. Create a Reverse Outline

Next, go to <http://www.mtsac.edu/writingcenter> for [Mt. SAC’s Writing Center website](#). At the top, select the link for DLAs. Scroll down for “Reverse Outlining DLA.” Under “Supplementary Links,” select and read the sample essay, [“Maybe You Shouldn’t Go Away to College,”](#) and create a reverse outline. Write the reverse outline in the space below.

3. Review Your Outline

Analyze the reverse outline you created in Activity 2 and answer the following questions:

1. Are the paragraphs properly focused or are there multiple ideas within a paragraph? Explain.

2. Are there extraneous ideas within a paragraph that can be deleted or moved to another, more pertinent paragraph? Are there unnecessary repetitions throughout the paper? Explain.

3. When you look at the paper as a whole, does the organization of the paper reflect what is promised in the intro/thesis?

4. When you look at the paper as a whole, does the logic of the argument flow well from paragraph to paragraph? Is there important information that should occur earlier in the paper?
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Choose 4a or 4b Below

4a. Work with Your Own Writing

Locate an essay you have previously written or one you are presently working on and create a reverse outline. Next analyze the reverse outline and write a paragraph (5-6 sentences) explaining what you will change in your essay and why. Turn this in with the outline and the rough draft to the tutoring session.

If you do not have your own essay to work with, please complete the supplemental activity below (4b).

4b. Create and Analyze a Reverse Outline

Go to <http://www.mtsac.edu/writingcenter> for the [Mt. SAC's Writing Center website](#). At the top, select the link for DLAs. Scroll down to "Reverse Outlining DLA," and under "Supplementary Links," select and read the sample essay "[The World of Photography](#)" and create a reverse outline. Next analyze the reverse outline and write a paragraph (5-6 sentences) explaining what you would change in the essay and why. Bring the reverse outline and paragraph to the tutoring session.

5. Review the DLA

Go to <https://mtsac2.mywconline.com> and use the [Mt. SAC Writing Center Appointment System](#) to make a DLA appointment, or sign-up to see a tutor on the "**DLA Walk-in**" list in the Writing Center. During your session with a tutor, the tutor will review your work and briefly discuss the process and purpose of creating a reverse outline. Consider the main concept you learned in this DLA. How will knowledge of these concepts affect your writing?

Student's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Tutor's Signature _____

Date: _____

If you are an individual with a disability and need a greater level of accessibility for any document in The Writing Center or on The Writing Center's website, please contact the Mt. SAC Accessible Resource Centers for Students, access@mtsac.edu, (909) 274-4290.

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