

Revision Activities

Reverse Outline

To make a reverse outline:

1. Number the paragraphs of your paper.
2. On a separate sheet of paper, or using the note cards, list the number of paragraphs in your paper, giving a line or two for each number (or a card for each)
3. Turn to your paper, read the first paragraph, and write on your list or card the main point you make in this paragraph.
 - a. If you can't summarize the content of a paragraph, you probably have multiple ideas in play in that paragraph that may need revising, note each of the ideas expressed in the paragraph.
4. Do the same for each paragraph of your paper in turn.
5. Now focus on your list (or cards), which reflects the direction of your paper
 - a. How well does the list cohere?
 - b. How does one idea connect to the next?
 - c. Are the connections between ideas made explicit in your writing?
6. Use your outline to do four things:
 - i. See whether each paragraph plays a role in supporting your thesis.
 - ii. What needs to be revised – your thesis? Or the order of the points in your argument?
 - iii. Look for unnecessary repetition of ideas.
 - iv. Compare your reverse outline with your paper to see whether the sentences in each paragraph are related to the main point of that paragraph, per the reverse outline.

Activities to follow reverse outline (choose one):

1. **Re-outline**—This technique helps with the organization of your paper so that your argument comes across clearly and is well supported.

Working from your reverse outline, and your thesis statement, take a fresh piece of paper and write an outline for how you want your argument to proceed. Or, re-order your note cards, possibly having to eliminate some or create others. Use what you can from your original draft, identify where you need new paragraphs, and what ideas they should contain. Be as detailed as possible: write down the point of the paragraph and the evidence from which you will draw.

2. **3x5 Note Card**— This technique will help you look at a draft on the paragraph-level.

On the reverse side of each note card list the evidence you use to back up your topic sentence. Then, evaluate how each paragraph fits into your thesis statement.

- Are your individual paragraphs internally coherent—i.e. do they have a single main idea?
- Do your reasons or evidence warrant your claims?
- Are you using textual evidence well and appropriately to the assignment?
- Are your paragraphs, and the claims within them, presented in a clear and understandable order?

Note: You will not have time to do this for every paragraph. Do two or three now and the rest on your own.

3. **Unpacking an Idea**—This exercise helps you fill in spots where argumentative support is lacking.

Select a certain paragraph in your essay and try to explain in more detail how the concepts or ideas fit together. Unpack the evidence for your claims by showing how it supports your topic sentence, main idea, or thesis. This technique will help you more deliberately explain the steps in your reasoning and point out where any gaps may have occurred within it. It will help you establish how these reasons, in turn, lead to your conclusions.

4. **Writing Between the Lines**—This technique helps you to be aware of complex concepts and to determine what needs additional explanation.

Add information between sentences and paragraphs to clarify concepts and ideas that need further explanation.

5. **Identifying Critical Questions**—This technique helps you focus on the central points in your paper and determine whether they are adequately explored and explained.

Write down the questions you had in mind when you began this paper. See if you can write a question or a series of questions that summarize the most important ideas in your paper. Once you have the critical questions, you can begin to organize your ideas around potential answers to the question. You can also determine whether or not all of the evidence and argument you provide is in fact relevant to answering your questions.