

Reverse Outlining

After your essay is drafted, you should read back over it to make sure what you've written matches what you need—and if it doesn't, then to find where you need to make revisions. A good way to do this is to create a reverse outline.

Step 1 ●

Reading your essay, look for the main points of your paper and collect them separately to form a brief outline of the essay. Most importantly, does your paper have a clear thesis statement and topic sentences where they need to be?

The thesis statement summarizes your entire essay in one sentence and comes toward the beginning, to give your readers a clear sense of what your essay is about.

The topic sentences are the first sentence of each body paragraph (or occur at the start of each subsection in a long paper) and sum up the main point of that paragraph or section.

- They act like mini-thesis statements for each paragraph or section.
- They should relate directly to the thesis statement and the main point of the whole essay.

By reading just the thesis statement and topic sentences, a reader should be able to clearly understand all the main points of your whole paper.

Looking at the skeleton of your essay, have you fulfilled all the requirements of your project?

Step 2 ●

If your thesis statement and topic sentences are not clear, then read through and briefly summarize the main point of every single paragraph. This will show you what's actually on the page, so you can see whether it reflects what you intended.

Ask yourself, do your ideas follow a logical sequence, or should they be reorganized? Does your essay as a whole fulfill the requirements of your project?

If yes, then take the summaries you've made and create a strong thesis statement and topic sentences to help your reader follow the sequence of ideas in your paper.

Step 3 ●

Once the skeleton of your essay is strong enough, try going into a bit more detail. Generally, the different parts of your essay should include the following:

1. Introduction

- a. Background and context
- b. Thesis statement – main point of the whole essay

2. **Body Paragraphs or Sections**

- a. Topic sentence – main point of the paragraph or section
- b. Details and analysis
- c. Concluding sentence – restating the paragraph or section's point

3. **Conclusion**

- a. Recap the main point/thesis
- b. Leave your reader with something to chew on

Again, looking at the draft you already have, are you including all the information your reader is expecting to see? Is your paper clear the way it is?

If not, then creating a reverse outline is a good way to see where the issues are that you should focus on during revision.