

# Using Reverse Outlines to Revise

## What is a Reverse Outline?

Similar to creating an outline before drafting a paper, reverse outlining is a revision strategy where writers create an outline *after drafting* based on the content in the current draft. Reverse outlining enables writers to assess each paragraph's main point at a glance as they think about structural, big-picture revision.

## How to Make a Reverse Outline?

1. On the side of a blank page or in the margins of your existing draft, put heading labels for each paragraph: ¶ 1, ¶ 2, and so forth.
2. Begin rereading the draft one paragraph at a time.
3. Summarize the main idea of each paragraph in a quick phrase. What is each paragraph about? What does it say?
4. Then summarize the purpose of each paragraph in a second quick phrase. What does each paragraph do for your argument?

## Your Reverse Outline May Look Something Like This:

Paragraph Number	Content (Says)	Purpose (Does)
¶ 1	About the idea of reverse outlines	Contextualizes term and establishes purpose
¶ 2	“How-to” steps	Shows how simple/easy the tactic is

## How Can a Reverse Outline Be Helpful?

Developing and consulting a reverse outline can help a writer:

- Identify the main ideas in each paragraph
- Assess the global organization of the paper (i.e., are your paragraphs in a logical order?)
- Strengthen transitions between paragraphs (i.e., how can you get from one idea to the next?)
- Recognize if body paragraphs do not connect to the thesis
- Identify redundant or misplaced ideas (e.g., if you revisit the same topic or purpose in paragraph 2, but also in paragraph 7)
- Determine if certain topics or ideas are undersupported or over supported (e.g., if you spend 3 paragraphs on one point of your thesis, but only 1 on another)
- Ensure the content of the paper meets the writing requirements

## Additional Notes

- If you have trouble quickly summarizing a paragraph's main idea, it may be a sign of unclear or too many ideas in a paragraph.
- When determining the purpose of each paragraph, start with lines like:
  - The point I want to make here is...
  - This paragraph develops my thesis by...
- If it's difficult to determine the purpose of a paragraph, try to think how to strengthen that paragraph's connection to your thesis or to refine that paragraph's role in your paper.



#	Content (Says)	Purpose (Does)
¶ 1		
¶ 2		
¶ 3		
¶ 4		
¶ 5		
¶ 6		
¶ 7		
¶ 8		