

## The Reverse Outline: Every Writer's Friend

While outlines can be a great planning tool, they can also be a highly effective way of approaching **revision**. When outlining *after* you have a more complete draft, consider **reverse outlining**. To create a reverse outline, follow these steps:

1. **Read and annotate the entire paper**. Next to each paragraph, note the topic and purpose of the paragraph in the left margin and briefly annotate how the paragraph helps the overall argument in the right margin.
2. After making your annotations, **open a new document**. Copy and paste:
  - The claim from your introduction paragraph (i.e. your **thesis statement**)
  - The **topic sentence** and the concluding sentence of each body paragraph
  - The entire conclusion
3. Compare your notes from the read-through to the reverse outline you just created. Consider:
  - Do paragraphs actively build off one another? If so: do you have transitions that show relationships between paragraphs? If not: do you need to add a new paragraph or sentence to create the connective tissue between paragraphs? Can you rearrange your paragraphs so they guide readers more clearly through your ideas?
  - Are there any paragraphs that are repetitive? If so, how can you be more *concise* (consider using Hemingway Editor) and combine the information into one paragraph?
  - On the other hand, do you have any paragraphs that move through or cram in multiple ideas without developing the points or providing a sense of how ideas fit together? How might you reorganize your ideas so that each paragraph covers *one* main point?
  - Does each topic sentence clearly indicate what the paragraph is about? If not, how can you make that more clear?
  - Does the claim (thesis statement) reflect what the body paragraphs prove? If not, how can you adjust your claim to be more in keeping with what the body paragraphs argue? Alternatively, how can you add to or change your body paragraphs to better support your claim?
  - Does your paper follow the road map you have outlined in your introduction, if applicable? If so, have you used transitions throughout to be sure your organizational choices are reflected throughout the paper? If not, can you revise your road map or paragraphs to match?
  - Does your conclusion sum up the main argument? If so, do you need to gesture to the broader stakes to make it even more effective? If not, can you make the conclusion more representative of your paper's argument?

These questions give you an idea of how to revise your organization to make your argument more effective.