



Reverse Outlines

You're already familiar with outlines as tools to plan your writing, but this activity helps you to improve what you've already written. A reverse outline is a powerful tool for focusing your efforts once you have generated a draft. Experienced writers often use a reverse outline to check their progress and set priorities for revising their work.

How to Make a Reverse Outline

1. Reread your assignment.
2. Read the first paragraph of your draft carefully.
3. Flip your paper over and summarize the first paragraph in one complete sentence on the back of the last page.
4. Flip back, then repeat 1. and 2. for each successive paragraph until the end of the paper.
5. Read the outline these sentences create. Then, answer the questions below.

Questions to Answer

1. CLARITY: How difficult was it to summarize each paragraph in one complete sentence? **This question will help you determine whether your ideas seem clear.**
2. FOCUS: Do some paragraphs seem to have too many unconnected ideas or strings of "and another interesting thing is...."? Does each example or major idea fulfill the assignment and help you make a clear point? **These questions will help you determine if your ideas seem focused.**
3. DEVELOPMENT: If you were to read only this reverse outline, would the reverse outline clearly present the heart of what you intended to show in the draft? **This question will help you see whether you are not only fulfilling the assignment but also making a well-supported point.**
4. GOALS: What, based on the results of the reverse outline, should you be sure to develop in revising your paper? **This question will help you to set priorities for developing a draft into a strong paper.**