



THE REVERSE OUTLINE

Texts are naturally organized in their authors' minds. The issue is how to organize texts so readers can follow them. As writers, we often ask, "Are they reading what I believe I have written?" The reverse outline is meant to help you decide whether you have written what you actually intended to write. It aims to help you read your text as if you were not the one who has written it. If you answer the following questions for each paragraph, you should begin to recognize where your argument works and where it needs more work.

Remember to be honest! If something isn't working, acknowledge it. If you are not sure, make a note and ask.

Topic/Thesis Paragraph

Basic information (information, general subject of text)

- ◆ What key information is included?
- ◆ What is left out?

Argument

- ◆ Write out your thesis as it appears.
- ◆ Does your thesis provide an explanation as to the "how" or "why"? If so, what? If not, what does it need to be?
- ◆ Does your claim provide an answer to the "so what" question? Do you establish the importance of your claim? If so, how? If not, what do you need to say?

Roadmap



- ◆ What basic points do you think the reader should expect to encounter as they read based on your introduction/thesis paragraph?

Body Paragraphs

Think of each paragraph as a “mini-essay”—each should have its own topic sentence that sets up what the rest of the paragraph will be about. Topic sentences should not be too repetitive—if they are, then parts of your paper may be redundant.

Paragraph 2

Topic sentence

- ◆ Write out the topic sentence as it appears.
- ◆ If the topic sentence is not currently at the beginning of the paragraph, make a note of that.
- ◆ If there is no topic sentence, write what you think it should be.

Mini-roadmap

- ◆ What information/evidence/discussion follows the “roadmap” of the topic sentence?
- ◆ What information/evidence/discussion does not follow the “roadmap” of the topic sentence?

Repeat the process above for each paragraph.

Conclusion Paragraph

Topic sentence



- ◆ Write out the topic sentence as it appears.
- ◆ If the topic sentence is not currently at the beginning of the paragraph, make a note of that.
- ◆ If there is no topic sentence, write what you think it should be.

Mini-roadmap

- ◆ What information/evidence/discussion follows the “roadmap” of the topic sentence?
- ◆ What information/evidence/discussion does not follow the “roadmap” of the topic sentence?
- ◆ Does your conclusion summarize the argument and expand upon your thesis? If yes, how so? If not? What do you need to do?

Now that you have outlined each paragraph, go back and decide the function/the purpose of each.

- ◆ Look back at your thesis. Are the purposes/functions that got accomplished in each paragraph sufficient to sustain your argument?
- ◆ If yes, great. If No, what can you change and how? Take an inventory or make a list of tasks to guide your revision.

*Developed by Hidy Basta, Ph.D.
Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, Antioch Seattle*