

Outlines and Reverse Outlines

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Outlines

- Must you write an *outline* before you write a paper?
 - Outlines can be informal or formal, and at various levels of detail
 - Don't expect to follow it slavishly — your topic and ideas will evolve

Example

THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

I. CHOOSE DESIRED COLLEGES

- A. Visit and evaluate college campuses
- B. Visit and evaluate college websites
 - 1. Look for interesting classes
 - 2. Note important statistics

II. PREPARE APPLICATION

- A. Write personal statement
 - 1. Choose interesting topic
 - a. Describe an influential person in your life
 - (1) Favorite high school teacher
 - (2) Grandparent

- b. Describe a challenging life event
 - 2. Include important personal details
 - a. Volunteer work
 - b. Participation in varsity sports
 - B. Revise personal statement

III. COMPILE RÉSUMÉ

- A. List relevant coursework
- B. List work experience
- C. List volunteer experience
 - 1. Tutor at language summer camp
 - 2. Suicide prevention counselor

Do Outlines Work for You?

- Do they work for you?
 - Do you know enough to write an outline before you start?
 - Is there enough detail for them to be useful?
- Is there an alternative?
 - *Write* your way into the topic

The Alternative: Reverse Outline

- Write a rough draft
- When you are ready to revise it:
 - Create an outline so that you can better-understand what's in it.
 - Use the outline to guide your revision
- Remember: all good writing is *re*-writing

Method 1: Purdue OWL

1. In the left-hand margin, write down the topic of each paragraph. Try to use *as few words as possible*.

When reading, these notes should work as quick references for future study or in-class discussion.

When revising your own work, these notes should tell you if each paragraph is focused and clear

2. In the right-hand margin, write down how the paragraph topic advances the overall argument of the text. Again, be brief.

When reading, these notes allow you to follow the logic of the essay, making it easier for you to analyze or discuss later.

When revising your own work, these notes should tell you if each paragraph fits in the overall organization of your paper. You may also notice that paragraphs should be shifted after completing this step.

2. In right-hand margin:

- write how the paragraph topic advances argument. Be brief.
- when reading, these notes expose the bones of the story — easier to analyze or discuss
- when revising, notes tell you if paragraph fits in the overall organization
- you may notice that paragraphs should be moved

2. In the right-hand margin, write down how the paragraph topic advances the overall argument of the text. Again, be brief.

When reading, these notes allow you to follow the logic of the essay, making it easier for you to analyze or discuss later.

When revising your own work, these notes should tell you if each paragraph fits in the overall organization of your paper. You may also notice that paragraphs should be shifted after completing this step.

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- Be brief
 - especially with your own work
 - If you can't summarize in 5-10 words, paragraph needs to be revised
 - paragraphs should have *one* topic
- Can expand into a written outline
 - but marginal notes are probably sufficient

Method 2: NCU Writing Ctr

- Number each ¶ on printout
- On separate sheet, for each ¶ write down:
 - number
 - main idea
 - support
- Check:
 - Is the purpose and thesis clear?
 - Is each paragraph coherent? does it relate to your topic?
 - Is the order of ¶s effective?
 - What can be cut? What needs to be added

Method 3: TAA

1. Select key sentence for each ¶
 - should cover all the content, but no more
2. Extract key sentence into new document: the outline
3. Look at the outline:
 - Can your key sentences be improved to better communicate?
 - Can they be better organized? More logical? More coherent?
4. In a large project, begin each day's writing by outlining the previous day's work