Reverse Outlining

Student Name:

Instructor:

Date:

Course

# About This DLA

## Important Note

All the activities (4) in the DLA must be completed in their entirety before receiving credit for completion. Students are welcome to meet with a tutor if they need help, but please be aware that students might need a second appointment for review and signature in that case. If your instructor wants evidence of this completed DLA, return this form to him or her with the tutor’s signature included.

## Learning Outcome

Students will be introduced to the reverse outlining strategy and will be able to create a reverse outline.

## Activities (approximately 1 hour)

Read the information, complete the activities that follow, and be prepared to discuss your answers when you meet with a tutor.

# Understanding the Reverse Outline

What comes to mind when you think of an outline? Most writers recall that an outline is done before a paper is written to help organize thoughts and ideas. A reverse outline, however, is done after the first draft of the paper is complete. A reverse outline is a helpful revising tool that highlights problem areas in organization, thesis support, and flow of the paper. It serves as an effective starting point for the revision process. That being said, it is important that your reverse outline be done as early as possible in the revision process, right after the first draft is written, so you won’t have to rework the organization of the entire paper later down the line.

**How do I create a reverse outline?**

1. Place a number next to each paragraph, including the introduction and conclusion.
2. On a separate sheet of paper, write #1 and list the main point (or points) of the first paragraph.
3. Repeat for each subsequent paragraph of the paper.
4. Look at your outline to see an overview of your paper or article and its main points.

**How do I analyze my reverse outline?**

Ask yourself the following questions:

* Are the paragraphs properly focused or are there multiple ideas within a paragraph? If you have difficulty summing up a paragraph in one or two sentences, there are probably multiple ideas within that paragraph.
* Are there extraneous ideas within a paragraph that can be deleted or moved to another, more pertinent paragraph? Are there unnecessary repetitions throughout the paper?
* When you look at the paper as a whole, does the organization of the paper reflect what you promised in your intro/thesis?
* When you look at the paper as a whole, does the logic of the argument flow well from paragraph to paragraph? Is there important information that should occur earlier in the paper?

[**Reverse Outline Example**](https://twp.duke.edu/sites/twp.duke.edu/files/file-attachments/reverse-outline.original.pdf)**\***

**Claim:** Deinstitutionalizing mental patients in the late twentieth-century led to transforming the “hobo” to the “homeless person.”

**Paragraph 1:** Introduction

**Paragraph 2:** The image of the hobo before World War II

**Paragraph 3:** The image of the homeless person today

**Paragraph 4:** The effects of deinstitutionalization

**Paragraph 5:** A history of deinstitutionalization

**Paragraph 6:** A history of the depression; how the depression is both different and similar to the time period of deinstitutionalization; incorrect beliefs about the causes and timeframe of deinstitutionalization

**Paragraph 7**: The Reagan administration’s policies on deinstitutionalization

**Paragraph 8**: The realities of life as a “homeless person” contrasted to the romantic notions of “riding the rails”

**Paragraph 9:** Conclusion

\*Duke University Writing Studio. March 2009. https://twp.duke.edu/sites/twp.duke.edu/files/file-attachments/reverse-outline.original.pdf

Now apply the following questions:

**Are the paragraphs properly focused or are there multiple ideas within a paragraph?**

* Paragraph 6 contains multiple ideas, too many for a single paragraph. Each of the ideas can be separated into different paragraphs.

**Are there extraneous ideas within a paragraph that can be deleted or moved to another, more pertinent paragraph?**

* Paragraphs 2 and 3 appear to have similar ideas to Paragraph 8. The ideas can be combined and moved closer together to strengthen the flow of the paper.
* Paragraph 7 appears to be extraneous unless the Reagan administration’s policies on deinstitutionalization can be connected to the thesis claim. If so, the Paragraph 7 can be included in the history of deinstitutionalization in Paragraph 5.
* Similarly, the history of the depression in Paragraph 6 is too broad a topic and should be clarified to focus on the hobo during the depression.

**When you look at the paper as a whole, does the organization of the paper reflect what you promised in your intro/thesis? Does the logic of the argument flow well from paragraph to paragraph? Is there important information that should occur earlier in the paper?**

* The claim of the paper is that deinstitutionalization has led to transforming the “hobo” to the “homeless person.” The claim emphasizes deinstitutionalization, but the paper begins with description of the “hobo.” Either the paper should begin with a discussion of deinstitutionalization or the claim should be reworked.
* With regard to the flow of the paper, history should come before effects. The history of deinstitutionalization in Paragraph 5 should be placed before the effects of deinstitutionalization in Paragraph 4. Similarly, the history of the depression in Paragraph 6 should be moved up.

After you analyze your reverse outline by answering the questions above, you can begin the revision process to ensure that your ideas are properly organized, clearly focused, and supportive of your thesis.

Additionally, when trying to understand and summarize a difficult text, a reverse outline allows you to do so easily. It requires you to put the difficult concepts into your own words as you summarize each paragraph. After all paragraphs are summarized, you can review your notes to see the overall point of the text.

\*Handout adapted from Monmouth University Writing Center’s Handout “Reverse Outlining”

# Activities

Check off each box once you have completed the activity.

## 1. Reverse Outline Review

What are the steps you should follow to create a reverse outline?

| Write the answer. |
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What is the purpose of a reverse outline?

| Write the answer. |
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## 2. Create a Reverse Outline

Read the following article.

**Maybe You Shouldn’t Go Away to College**

Going away to college is not for everyone. There are good reasons why a student might choose to live at home and attend a local school. Money, finding stability while changes are occurring, and accepting responsibility are three to consider.

Money is likely to be most important. Not only is tuition more expensive, but extra money is needed for room and board. Whether room and board is a dorm or an apartment, the expense is great.

Most students never stop to consider that the money that could be saved from room and board may be better spent in future years on graduate school, which is likely to be more important in their careers.

Going to school is a time of many changes anyway, without adding the pressure of a new city or even a new state. Finding stability will be hard enough, without going from home to a dorm. Starting college could be an emotional time for some, and the security of their home and family might make everything easier.

When students decide to go away to school, sometimes because their friends are going away, or maybe because the school is their parents’ alma mater, something that all need to decide is whether or not they can accept the responsibility of a completely new way of life.

Everyone feels as if they are ready for total independence when they decide to go away to college, but is breaking away when they are just beginning to set their futures a good idea?

Going away to school may be the right road for some, but those who feel that they are not ready might start looking to the future that is just around the corner.

Now write a reverse outline in the space below.

| Write your outline here. |
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## 3. Review Your Outline

Analyze the reverse outline you created in Activity 2 and answer the following questions:

1. Are the paragraphs properly focused or are there multiple ideas within a paragraph? Explain.

| Write the answer |
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1. Are there extraneous ideas within a paragraph that can be deleted or moved to another, more pertinent paragraph? Are there unnecessary repetitions throughout the paper? Explain.

| Write the answer |
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1. When you look at the paper as a whole, does the organization of the paper reflect what is promised in the intro/thesis?

| Write the answer |
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1. When you look at the paper as a whole, does the logic of the argument flow well from paragraph to paragraph? Is there important information that should occur earlier in the paper?

| Write the answer |
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## Choose 4a or 4b Below

## 4a. Work with Your Own Writing

Locate an essay you have previously written or one you are presently working on and create a reverse outline. Next analyze the reverse outline and write a paragraph (5-6 sentences) explaining what you will change in your essay and why. Turn this in with the outline and the rough draft to the tutoring session.

**If you do not have your own essay to work with, please complete the supplemental activity below (4b).**

## 4b. Create and Analyze a Reverse Outline

Read the following essay and write a reverse outline. The prompt is to write a three-page expository essay informing your reader about a hobby of yours. The essay should be thesis-driven and use appropriate tone and style for an academic essay.

**spacer30The World of Photography**

Photography is a form of documentation that can freeze motion, create snap shots, and capture unforgettable moments that anyone can relate themselves too; it is an art that surrounds us constantly. Photography is a hobby that can be learned through experience and hands on experiments that you can learn to love. For some reason, many people have a first impression of photography as it being complicated, but the reality is that it is not. As soon as you see yourself with a camera in hand every challenge seems to fall into place naturally.

The existence of photography has been around for a long time and it has managed to become an art. It has also shown power through the variety of images that exist in today’s society. For instance, a powerful photograph that anyone can recall seeing before is a picture taken by Dorthea Lange of a migrant woman with one child in her arms while another two young boys are leaning against her shoulders one at each side. As the children face away from the camera lens the mother gazes off, looking helpless. This photograph was taken during The Great Depression in 1930 and has been displayed in museums such as The Getty in Los Angeles, Ca. By looking at that photograph we can only predict the hard times people were faced with at the time. Even possibly the suffering and hunger those children might have gone through.

Photographs also informed us of important news that deal with both local and international events that mark our life’s and have also impacted us. In particular, when the unforgettable event of what we know as; “9/11” accord in our country the whole world felt sorrow for the hundreds of people that had their life’s taken away. Instantly, when images started circulating the media of the exact moment two planes hit the Twin Towers in New York the world was in shocked. We often are able to recall the two buildings tumbling down into millions of pieces. Graphic images of the aftermath can be found in any website by typing in the keywords of 9/11. These images can also be easily seen by other generation of people and the contrast of each individual photograph can affect the way someone sees the world. Another example of a memorable photograph would be that of Marilyn Monroe, when photographers captured her; in what became to be her signature pose, as she walked under air vents and her white dress went up unexpectedly. Snap shots were taken of Monroe often as she posed for different magazines in particular one that we can recall is Playboy. And because of her for famous pose many fans have mimicked her white dress, red lips and curly waves as Halloween costumes.

Photography is a hobby you can enjoy it is very useful especially because it keeps you entertained with the endless possibilities that can be done with a camera. You can create powerful images by using traditional film cameras and even digital. Photography gives you the impression of its usefulness it can also ignite anyone to the interesting field of photography. You can document special events, and even go to the extremes to get the right shot.

In a course I took during my sophomore year in high school we were taught that the small view finder usually located in the top corner of a camera, helps focus and compose pictures. It made most of us view the world in different angles when reality came through its artificial lens. We were also given the opportunity to practice in front of mirrors, in public places and with friends that allowed us to capture their images. At the beginning it seemed a bit awkward carrying around a 55mm lens camera, everyone would look towards the direction of the flash. But yet I realized that that was what made me feel like a photographer. Although, I have not yet been able to create such memorable images such as those of Dorthea Lange and Lauren Amrhein it is still enjoyable to have a hobby that can keep you entertain by simply composing photographs.

In the great words of Irving Penn, “A good photograph is one that communicates a fact, touches the heart, leaves the viewer a changed person for having seen it. It is, in a word, effective.” You can emphasize your work in one area by practicing with any camera, exposure times, and aperture sizes while paying close attention to your subjects’ features good work can be accomplished. To be a photographer you do not have to be photogenic, in order to capture memorable images all you need is an open mind for adventure. Furthermore, I would recommend anyone to take photography into their lives as a hobby or a possible profession. You will eventually end up falling in love with this art. So when are you giving photography a try?

Now analyze the reverse outline and write a paragraph (5-6 sentences) explaining what you would change in the essay and why. Bring the reverse outline and paragraph to the tutoring session.

## 5. Review the DLA

Go to https://mtsac2.mywconline.com and use the [Mt. SAC Writing Center Appointment System](https://mtsac2.mywconline.com/) to make a DLA appointment, or sign-up to see a tutor on the “**Walk-in**” list in the Writing Center. During your session with a tutor, the tutor will review your work and briefly discuss the process and purpose of creating a reverse outline. Consider the main concept you learned in this DLA. How will knowledge of these concepts affect your writing?

Student’s Signature:

Tutor’s Signature

Date:

Date:

If you are an individual with a disability and need a greater level of accessibility for any document in The Writing Center or on The Writing Center’s website, please contact the Mt. SAC Accessible Resource Centers for Students, [access@mtsac.edu](mailto:access@mtsac.edu), (909) 274-4290.

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