

ORGANIZATION

Reverse Outlining

Some assignments ask you to read and analyze complex information. In these cases, reverse outlining can help you distill the main ideas into short, clear statements. You may also use reverse outlining to revise your own work.

Step One: Highlight or underline the thesis and the topic sentences/main idea sentences in each paragraph.

- When reading textbooks or articles, these can work as indications of what is important to study or bring up in class.
- When revising your own work, these sentences should clearly answer the assignment prompt and prove whatever point you are trying to make.

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

- When reading textbooks or articles, 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. Consider whether or not each paragraph focuses on only one topic.

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

- When reading textbooks or articles, 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 or split apart after completing this step.

*You should be able to summarize the topic and the manner of support quickly;
if you can't, revise the paragraphs until you can.*

Questions to Ask:

1. Does every paragraph support the thesis?
2. Do all of your supporting details relate to your topic sentences or main idea?
3. Does one paragraph try to juggle several topics?
4. Where might a reader have trouble following the order of ideas?
5. Are any paragraphs too long or too short?

Topic of Each Paragraph	Main Sentence	Relationship to Thesis

