



Be Your Own Consultant: Reverse Outlining

Reverse outlining is an activity to help you turn a rough draft of a paper into a more effective final draft. In this exercise, we will look at the higher order concerns that the DEWC consultants examine—argument structure, paper organization, and thesis statement—before reviewing lower order concerns—grammar, sentence structure, and language use. We have designed this as an interactive activity using a physical copy of your paper draft and a different colored pencil for each step.

1. **THESIS:** Choose a colored pencil and draw a box around your thesis statement. Is the scope of your thesis statement too broad or too narrow to fit the length of the paper? Is it arguable? Is it specific? Does it make sense as a sentence and does it make the most sense for your paper? Is this the most interesting approach to your argument? (Use the DEWC's Thesis Statement resource for additional help in writing a thesis.)
2. **CLAIMS:** Choose a colored pencil and draw a box around the major claims in the paper (these are the arguable statements around which you organize your paragraphs). On a blank piece of paper, write out the outline of your overall argument by copying down the claims. Is the order of the claims effective? Could your argument be strengthened? Do your claims back up your thesis statement? Are your claims arguable?
3. **PARAGRAPHS:** Choose a colored pencil and draw a box around the evidence within each paragraph (the quotations, ideas, or proof that you are using to back up the arguments). Is every claim supported by adequate evidence from the text? Is each paragraph unified around a single idea? Do you have evidence or ideas that need to be in a different paragraph?
4. **INTRODUCTION:** Choose a colored pencil and draw a box around the introduction. Is there a clear introduction that sets up the context of the argument you outline in your thesis statement?
5. **CONCLUSION:** Choose a colored pencil and draw a box around the conclusion. Does the conclusion summarize your argument in an interesting way? Do you address the prompt as effectively as possible?
6. **TRANSITIONS AND SEGUES:** Choose a colored pencil and draw a box around transitions and segues within each paragraph. Are there strong transitional phrases that make it clear when the paper moves from one section to another? How could you strengthen the clarity of your argument by helping your reader follow your argument more easily?
7. **LANGUAGE USE:** Choose a colored pencil and draw a box around any sentences you're worried about. What grammar rules are you unsure about? Are there words you aren't sure you are using correctly? Take a minute to look up the grammar rules online or in a grammar handbook and then go back to correct the grammar issues in your paper (See the DEWC's resources called Be Your Own Consultant: Grammar and Be Your Own Consultant: Punctuation).

At the end of this exercise, you should have a reverse outline on one piece of paper and a well-marked draft. If you need to, try this exercise in separate parts (start with thesis statement and claims before turning to transitions and segues) on multiple versions so that your drafts are readable as you revise your paper.