

Revision

Tips

Reverse Outline Revision

The reverse outline is a useful technique for refining a working thesis and for establishing unity between your thesis statement and the body of your paper. When you outline a paper you intend to write, you do so prospectively—that is, before the fact of writing. In a reverse outline you outline the paper retrospectively—after the fact. The reverse outline is useful for spotting gaps in logic or development as problems with unity or coherence. Follow these steps to generate a reverse outline.

On a fresh document, restate your thesis, making certain that the thesis you began with is the thesis that in fact governs the logic of the paper. **Hint: Look for a competing thesis in your conclusion.** In summing up you may have clarified for yourself what your actual governing idea is as opposed to the idea you thought would organize the paper.

- In the margin of your draft, **summarize** each paragraph in a phrase. If you have trouble writing a summary, place an asterisk by the paragraph as a reminder to clarify it later.
- In the margin, also write down the **purpose** of each paragraph as it relates to your thesis.
- Beneath your thesis, write your paragraph-summary phrases, one to a line, in outline format.

Clarity

- Review the outline that you have just created.
- Is the paper divided into readily identifiable major points in support of the thesis?
- Have you supported each point sufficiently?

Clarity (cont.)

- Do the sections of the outline lead logically from one to the next?
- Do all sections develop the thesis?
- Watch especially for uneven development. Add or delete material as needed to ensure a balanced presentation