A reverse outline helps you take stock of your draft and figure out how to revise it for better organization.

Use this handout if you frequently struggle to structure your ideas or if your professor has asked you to provide better transitions between paragraphs.

**Reverse Outline**

**Objective:**A reverse outline helps you to take stock of your draft and identify what you are *actually* saying (or not saying) in your paper.

**Directions:**

* Go through and number each of your body paragraphs.
* Read through the first paragraph and identify what that paragraph is doing. Is it introducing an idea? Is it providing background information? Is it providing an example? Offering a counterargument? Something else entirely? Keep in mind that you aren’t considering what you *intended* the paragraph to do. For the reverse outline, you are concerned only with what is actually on the page.
* In the margins or on a separate piece of paper, describe what the first body paragraph is doing. If the paragraph is doing more than one thing, write down each function.
* Move on to the next paragraph, repeating this same process for the entire paper. Don’t stop until you have a record of what each and every paragraph is doing.

**Once You Have Identified What Each Paragraph Is Doing:**

Now that you have a written record of what each paragraph is doing, try to locate and **write down** any places where you are:

1. Discussing several different ideas in the same paragraph
2. Starting thoughts that you don’t finish/introducing ideas that you don’t develop
3. Being unnecessarily repetitive by repeating the same claim in different paragraphs
4. Failing to connect a paragraph to your main argument
5. Writing paragraphs that do not have any particular function

**Once you’ve determined if you are making some of these problematic moves, you’ll have a better sense of where you want to revise in terms of structure.**