

Revising Writing: Organizing with the Reverse Outline

1. Silently read your draft. Try to pretend you are someone else, and just read to your self and pay attention to what is being said.
2. Turn your draft upside down (so you can't see it) and write a quick summary, using the third person, as in, "This writer says ____ and then ____; she or he supports her point by saying ____ and then ____, etc." The point is to detach from your writing and try to simply describe it.
3. Turn your draft back over and write an outline as you may have been taught when you were a kid (but don't worry about the roman numerals and all the rules – it's an ordered list most of all). The task at hand is to write down the logic of what you have written – to record what you have so that you can really see it. What makes this a "reverse outline" is that you are not writing what you *intended* to write, but you are recording in detail what it is that you *actually* did. There's usually a difference!

For each paragraph write down a phrase or sentence that explains what the paragraph is doing. See the example in Hacker, or this one below:

Paragraph 1: "Makes point that immigrants are able to survive without learning very much English. Gives example of grandmother. Notes that grandmother wouldn't survive without children and grandchildren. [Note to self: is this example working?]"

Par 2: Describes Dumas' essay and says that her parents are succeeding without great English skills.

Etc.

4. Planning: Study your reverse outline, or better yet, review it with a classmate. What is missing? Where do you go off topic? What more needs to be said to make your central claim persuasive? What else needs to be done?

Go back to the draft and write. This is a time for *global revision*, not surface-level revision.