REVERSE OUTLINES

Reverse outlining, which you do after you've written a draft, allows you to check your structure. Reverse outlining helps you:

1. Strengthen your argument or locate weak areas
2. Improve organization/structure
3. Decide if you've met requirements
4. Refine different areas of the paper

Being able to visualize your paper's structure and seeing your piece broken down will help you with organization, thereby aiding the overall clarity of the piece.

Creating a Reverse Outline:

- Start with a complete (recommended) or partial draft.
- Develop the outline using the topic sentences of each paragraph. If you don't have topic sentences, summarize each paragraph in one sentence, and list those.
- Number the list for referencing purposes.

Example of a Reverse Outline Format:

- Introduction:
  - Thesis Statement:
- Body 1—Topic Sentence:
- Body 2—Topic Sentence:
- Body 3—Topic Sentence:
- Body 4—Topic Sentence:
- Conclusion:

Does Your Reverse Outline Meet the Following Criteria?

- Every paragraph relates back to the thesis
- Readers don't have trouble following the order of your ideas
- You relate back to your thesis, but you aren't repetitive
- Your paragraphs are an appropriate length and contain an appropriate number of ideas.

Revising Your Paper with the Help of Your Reverse Outline:

- Did my thesis (or claim) change as I wrote? (If so, you should revise your thesis to reflect your updated stance.)
- Did I stray from my thesis as I wrote? (If so, you should revise your body paragraphs.)
- Am I clear? (Look for areas where you can improve organization.)
- Do all of my paragraphs have purpose? (Check to see if all of your paragraphs are necessary for understanding your stance.)

For more help, visit a writing tutor. All appointments are available in-person at the Student Success Center, located in the Library, or online. Resource adapted from The University of Wisconsin – Madison.