

How to Revise Your Essay: Reverse Outlining

One way to make your essay stronger is to reverse outline after the first draft. This process works in this way:

1. Write a draft of the essay.
2. Print it out and number every paragraph.
3. Now re-read each paragraph and write a very short summary (a few words, not a complete sentence). This summary should describe what each paragraph is about or doing. For example: “Explains this concept”; “defines my term or keywords”, “applies my terms of keywords. Sometimes paragraphs do more than one thing, and that’s ok.
4. If you can’t simply describe what is the function of the paragraph, then there’s probably too much going on in it, and it either needs to be broken up or given more transitional passages.
5. You can use this process to highlight paragraphs that need more work, to discover concision by seeing what may be repetitive (especially in terms of arguments), and how paragraphs might be renumbered or rearranged to make the argument flow more effectively.