

HOW TO CREATE A REVERSE OUTLINE

Based on a paper that you have already written, create a reverse outline that strips your paper of its supporting content and leaves only its main ideas. This allows you to evaluate the organization, logical flow, and clarity of your paper.

Tip: use bullet points to list each element of your reverse outline. That way, you can clearly see the paper's structure!

BUILDING YOUR REVERSE OUTLINE

1. **After you finish writing your paper, open a blank document.** You will create your reverse outline in this document.
2. **Write your thesis statement.**
3. **Write a one-sentence summary of each paragraph from the body of your paper.** If you have trouble summarizing a paragraph in one sentence, you may have too many ideas in that paragraph. Try splitting it into two or more paragraphs.

EXAMPLE OF A REVERSE OUTLINE

Paper topic: Contrast brewing coffee at home against buying coffee at a shop.

Thesis statement: Consumers prefer brewing coffee at home over buying coffee from their local coffee shop because brewing at home saves money, provides consumers with more control over their coffee's flavor, and allows for convenient refills throughout the day.

- **Paragraph 1:** Introduce the topic by discussing the number of people who brew their own coffee at home versus buying their daily coffee at a coffee shop.
- **Paragraph 2:** For daily coffee consumers, brewing coffee at home saves hundreds of dollars a year.
- **Paragraph 3:** Brewing coffee at home grants consumers full control over added flavorings.
- **Paragraph 4:** Coffee shops are a tempting option for many consumers because of their convenience and hip atmosphere.
- **Paragraph 5:** Brewing at home also gives consumers access to convenient refills throughout the day.
- **Paragraph 6:** The flavor of coffee is also affected by the method of brewing, which consumers can choose for themselves at home.
- **Paragraph 7:** In conclusion, despite the appeal of coffee shops, most American consumers still prefer to brew their own coffee at home.

EVALUATING YOUR REVERSE OUTLINE

Once you complete your reverse outline,

1. **Evaluate the relation between your paragraphs and your thesis statement.** Does each paragraph support your thesis statement?

In the previous example, Paragraph 4 does not support the thesis statement.

Thesis statement: Consumers prefer brewing coffee at home over buying coffee from their local coffee shop because brewing at home saves money, provides consumers with more control over their coffee's flavor, and allows for convenient refills throughout the day.

X Paragraph 4: Coffee shops are a tempting option for many consumers because of their convenience and hip atmosphere.

Note: If a paragraph does not support the thesis statement, its content could be added to a different paragraph or removed from the paper altogether.

2. **Evaluate the logical flow of your paragraphs.** Does each paragraph flow logically into the next paragraph?

In the previous example, Paragraph 6 does not flow logically from Paragraph 5..

Paragraph 5: Brewing at home also gives consumers access to convenient refills throughout the day.

X Paragraph 6: The flavor of coffee is also affected by the method of brewing, which consumers can choose for themselves at home.

Instead, Paragraph 6 flows best after Paragraph 3.

Paragraph 3: Brewing coffee at home grants consumers full control over added flavorings.

✓ Paragraph 6: The flavor of coffee is also affected by the method of brewing, which consumers can choose for themselves at home.

3. **Compare your topic sentences to your one-sentence summaries.** A topic sentence introduces the main idea of a paragraph in a single statement and appears as the very first sentence in the paragraph. If one of your topic sentences differs vastly from its corresponding one-sentence summary, you may need to revise the topic sentence to better reflect the paragraph's main idea.

PRACTICE NOW