

Revising with the Backwards Outline: Where do I go from here?

1. Consider rewriting your topic sentences.

- Backwards outlines often reveal weak or misleading topic sentences. Ponder the following questions and make appropriate changes.
 - Do your topic sentences accurately correspond with the summaries that your reader wrote about each of your paragraphs?
 - Are your topic sentences argumentative? Occasionally, topic sentences must act as purposeful summaries. However, every topic sentence should inform and forward the argument presented in your thesis statement.

2. Assess the relevance and quality of your evidence.

- Once your topic sentences effectively illustrate your thesis statement, ensure that the evidence in each paragraph relates directly to your topic sentences. Completing the following activity will help you identify whether or not your evidence is relevant:
 - Write your revised topic sentences on a separate piece of paper. Leave space between the topic sentences.
 - Identify the key points in each paragraph. There should be no more than three main points in each paragraph. If you have more than three key points, you should add an additional paragraph.
 - Summarize each of your key points under the appropriate topic sentence.
 - Look at your outline. Does each key point address the topic sentence above it in a clear and direct manner?
 - Within each paragraph, are the key points presented in a logical and helpful order?

3. Consider revising the order of your paragraphs.

- Backwards outlining forces you to confront the logic behind your paragraph order. What did your backwards outline reveal about the logic behind your argument structure? Use the following questions to further evaluate your structural choices.
 - If you have three (or four, or whatever) reasons for something, why are the reasons in the order they're in?
 - If you have ordered your paper from cause to effect, why did you do that? Why not effect to cause?
 - If you have organized your paper to echo the organization of the text that you are writing about, why have you done that? If you did, you risk having written a mere summary.
 - If you organized your paper to match the terms of the assignment, is that what your instructor wanted, or did your instructor want something more original from you?
 - If you organized your paper around major topics in your assignment ("Compare and contrast Freud and Jung in terms of the role of society in the development of their theories") did you write about, say, Freud first and Jung second simply because that was the order in the assignment?

4. Ensure that your thesis statement still accurately captures your paper's argumentative direction.

- After you revise your topic sentences, reevaluate your evidence, and assess your paragraph order, your thesis statement might no longer perfectly capture your paper's argumentative development. Use your revisions to shape your new thesis statement.
 - Please stop by the Writing Center for additional help!