**REVERSE OUTLINING and ARGUMENT MAPPING**

Reverse outlining is a tool to be used, along with the client read-aloud, to help you map/understand the client’s argument, so that you can set goals for revision. As you listen to your client read, take note of the major critical transitions, claims, potential arguments and possible positions that the writer may need to clarify in the next draft. In the reverse outlining process, you need to address when your argument map (the reader’s map) does not match the client’s own understanding of his/her argument progression or does not match the structure of the essay itself—thesis statement, topic sentences, transitions, concluding sentences, explanations of evidence or conclusion statements. Remember, as a reader, you represent the professor/course goals. So you can also use this technique to ensure that the paper addresses both the explicit and implicit goals of the assignment or of the professor’s comments on a draft.

So What Exactly *is* Reverse Outlining?

You make the outline by taking each body paragraph, identifying what it contributes to the argument of the paper, and summarizing the main idea of the paragraph in one or two sentences.

What is Reverse Outlining Useful for?

* Mapping the client’s argument to better understand how the argument progresses.
* Showing your client how his/her thesis and body paragraphs differ from (or relate to) each other.
* If a client is having trouble constructing a thesis for an existing draft.
* If a client has a long paper, backwards outlining can be useful to identify weaker parts of the client’s argument, poor choice of argument placement, or lack of balance or momentum in an argument.
* Working on building an effective argument (re-ordering evidence in the most effective, persuasive way)
* Checking to see if the paper addresses the goals of the assignment.
* Coming up with topic sentences and transitions and better explanations or choice of evidence.
* Providing your client with a useful tool to apply to his/her writing outside of the Writing Center.

Why it is Helpful for Both Tutors and Clients:

* Helps clients to organize their thinking both visually and verbally.
* Helps clients to see the relationship between the argument in a thesis statement and how it’s realized in the body of a paper.
* Helps clients to identify what they already know about a topic and where they may need to add more information.
* Helps tutors quickly grasp the content of client work prior to making corrections.
* Helps tutors guide/ structure a session.
* Helps tutors bridge the gap between what clients think they are arguing or want to argue and what is actually written on the paper.

**Note:** A reverse outline is not a sufficient end-product. Instead, it is a tool to help guide the revision progress. What you do after constructing the backwards outline results in an end-product.

Reverse Outlining is done as follows:

1. Have the client read aloud the paper.
2. Ask the client the topic of the paragraph and write down enough words in the margin to represent what is in the paragraph. Ask, “What is the point of this paragraph?” or “What exactly are you saying about this subject?” Make sure to label each paragraph with the client’s response. Repeat for each paragraph. Meanwhile, you keep your own list, which may differ from that of the client.
3. Examine the list of descriptions that you have made for each paragraph and ensure that you and the client can identify a sentence that clearly states the main point in each paragraph. Discuss any differences between your two lists and why these differences may exist. In other words, there may be an argument that is implied that the client does not fully recognize.
4. If the main point of a paragraph is not clearly stated, ask questions to identify the core of the paragraph, such as, “What does this paragraph add to the rest of the paper?” Then help the client write these sentences down in his or her own language. Ask him or her where he or she might add this sentence the paragraph you are discussing.
5. Now go back to the introductory paragraph. Have the client identify his or her thesis. Use the thesis to assure that the main point of each paragraph relates to the main point of the paper. Identify connections between these claims and the thesis. If the material is unrelated, either the paragraph or thesis may need to be modified.
6. Now that you connected each paragraph to the overall argument, determine if there is a consistent, logical structure in the organization of these ideas. Did one claim build upon another? Does the order of the paragraphs make a difference? Does the organization effectively support and advance the argument?  What order might help with transitions? If there are problems with the sequence of paragraphs, rearrange the ideas with the client to improve the organization and effectiveness of the argument.

**EXAMPLE:**

Below are the first two pages of an application essay based upon a newspaper article. The reverse outlining technique has been applied and marked as a model.

On September 10, 1999, the St. Louis Post Dispatch ran an article penned by Vahe Gregorian entitled, “Why are the players leaving?” In this article, Gregorian reported that an increasing number of Division I NCAA football players are taking either large amounts of time off, or are quitting the sport altogether. Most of these players, scholarship-winning, prime athletes, cite personal reasons as for why they left the game. The University of Missouri football team lost sixteen players (three seniors, four juniors, two sophomores, and five freshmen) from this year’s team. One of the Missouri sixteen, freshman Cameron Ankele, stated, “I can’t say that it is a shock to me that all these guys quit, but I don’t think that it’s a problem with the program.” Ankele also speculated, “Many of his peers had lost their fire for the game. And rather than make themselves unhappy, they made a change” (Conner 1999). In recent years, a disturbing trend has been occurring in modern sports.

Burnout is not limited to college level team sports. Burnout also occurs in individual sports and with young pre-college athletes.

Sally is a seventeen year-old high school varsity swimmer who shows considerable promise in her sport. Her times have continued to improve steadily over the last few seasons, and people are discussing her as our next U.S. Olympic hope. However, Sally has decided to decline numerous college scholarship offers and stop swimming. Although she loves the feeling of learning how to swim faster and enjoys the social atmosphere of the pool, she has become tired of the year-round, twice daily, 4,000 - meter workouts. Sally also feels emotionally drained from her attempts to live up to her parents’, coaches’, and teammates’ expectations that she win races, set records, and lead the team to victory everytime she competes. In short, Sally is an adolescent sports burnout (Gould 1993)

Numerous anecdotal accounts exist of athletes who have become fed up with sport participation and stopped competing at what should have been the pinnacle of their careers. Although the media only mentions it when an elite athlete has this type of reaction, sports psychology researchers have also suggested that burnout occurs in younger athletes who are extensively involved in sport (Gould 1993).

Because of situations like Sally’s and Cameron’s, sport leaders and researchers have become increasingly interested in athletic burnout. The source of burnout, the effects of burnout, and the measure for burnout reduction are the stepping stones that we as coaches and future coaches need to understand before we can assess our roles in preventing and recovering the burnt-out athlete. Unfortunately, research is limited, and our questions currently outweigh our scientific knowledge. However, the new interest has greatly increased the number of ongoing studies on the topic.

Burnout is of extreme importance to all coaches. Although most focus on burnout is when it occurs among elite athletes, sports psychologists are finding data that suggests burnout is spread throughout all persons extensively involved in sports, no matter what level of competition.

Since the success or recognition levels that a coach can achieve is only obtainable by the work of the athlete, it is important for the coach to be in touch with the feelings and inner workings of the player. Athletes who are becoming/or are burnt out will disrupt the teams chemistry, and will have decreased personal performance. This occurrence is not easily overcome, and is often irreparable over the course of a single season.

A final reason that coaches need to be aware of burnout symptoms is that they are often the only source of protection between the player and the ever-increasing pressures of sport participation. Also, the coaches are in control of “what” the athletes are doing while they are participating in their sport. The coach can use different coaching techniques, and creative strategies to build enjoyment among the players.

**Module Comprehension Check:**

1. What does a reverse, or “backwards,” outline show a client?
2. How would you explain the steps of making a backwards outline to a client?
3. How might a backwards outline foster client independence?
4. How can a backwards outline help a tutor find the problem-behind-the-problem?
5. A client wants to “check over” her draft, mainly for editing, but, after hearing her read aloud the introduction, you have concerns. How could you “sell” a reverse outline to the client at this point?