

After-the-Fact Outlines

After you've committed your thoughts to a draft, how do you revise to make sure that readers will understand what you mean to say?

As a revising tool, an after-the-fact outline can show you if your draft really says what you think it does. This technique is based on the principle that every paragraph serves a larger purpose in the essay as a whole. For example, when you say what a paragraph "does" in an essay, you are saying *how* it helps develop your thesis.

Further, by revealing how different parts of your essay relate to each other and to your thesis, this technique also helps you to take control of your writing.

Format:

Include the following elements in your outline:

- Thesis or theme
(State the thesis of your essay)
- Strategy
(In two or three sentences, describe the overall movement of thought, from beginning to end—are you describing cause and effect? Moving from general to specific? Moving from least important to most important?)
- For each paragraph
(Briefly describe what the paragraph *says*. Next, describe what it *does* in relation to the rest of the essay)

How to Create the Outline:

- For the Strategy, explain how your essay has been designed to persuade readers that your thesis is reasonable. If a paragraph does not support your thesis, it may need to be reframed or removed.
- For what each paragraph *says*, write a three to four word paraphrase of the paragraph. In your own words, what is the paragraph about in a nutshell? If you can't describe what you discuss in a few words, you might be dealing with too many ideas in a single paragraph.
- For what each paragraph *does*, explain the function that the paragraph serves for the essay. How does its assertion move the argument forward?

(See chart on reverse side)

Example Functions of Paragraphs

<i>Compare or contrast</i>	Introduce objects or events to be examined alongside each other, for the purpose of clarifying their features or evaluating them.
<i>Concede</i>	Acknowledge the presence of a fact or opinion that might counter your own argument.
<i>Define</i>	State the meaning of a word or words previously or subsequently used.
<i>Evaluate</i>	Make some judgment about an event or condition named in a previous paragraph or paragraphs.
<i>Exemplify</i>	Give an illustration of what is meant by a previous statement, or give a concrete instance that will help make the point credible or vivid.
<i>Identify a cause or result</i>	Point out what produced a particular event or what effects that event produced.
<i>Narrate</i>	Name an event or a chronological series of events to assert that it occurred or to help particularize a previous point.
<i>Counter</i>	Offer reasoning or evidence to demonstrate the falsity of a previous point.
<i>Qualify</i>	Restrict the meaning of an assertion already made.
<i>Summarize</i>	Bring together the principal ideas already introduced.
<i>Support</i>	Offer reasoning or evidence to demonstrate the rightness of a previous paragraph.

Once you have outlined all your paragraphs, examine your current paragraph order. Ask yourself these questions:

- Are like ideas together or do you bounce back and forth between ideas?
- Is there a clear logic determining why you go from one paragraph to another? What is this logic—does it match the strategy you identified at the beginning of your outline?
- Are there any misplaced paragraphs that need to be moved or rearranged?

Using this technique before considering a draft to be final will help you check your logic and organization. Are you really saying what you think you are? Is the order of your paragraphs logical and easy to follow?