

# Reverse outlines

## Making an outline or skeleton of your draft text

Once you have completed a draft of an assignment, or a section of it, you can make an outline to help revise and restructure the text.

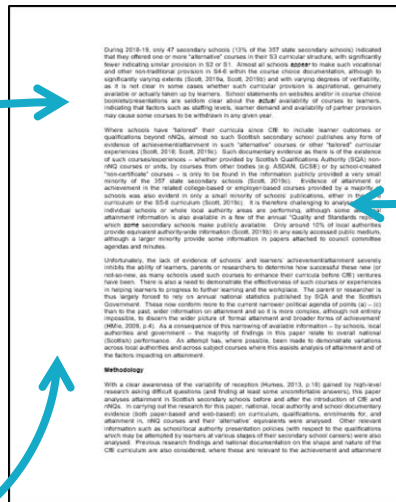
- Helps you to stand back and take an overview;
- Makes you think about how parts of a text are related;
- Can help you see if each paragraph is focused and clear;
- Helps to test if you are moving the overall argument on.




## Reverse outlining in action


A variation on a method originally devised by Rachael Cayley (2011).

**1** Print out your draft text with a wide margin.



Too many topics?   
Should some complex paragraphs be split?

**2** Write in the topic(s) of each paragraph in this left-hand column.

 If the topic isn't clear, why not?

**3** Number each topic.

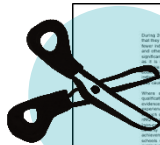
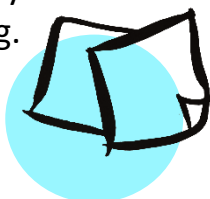
Steps 1 to 4 help you find out what you've got – it won't be perfect!

**4** Write each of the topics on a numbered sticky note.



## Next steps

Move your sticky notes around to get the best order for your line of reasoning.



**Cut and paste!**  
Try a new order.

If you decide to move your paragraphs around, be prepared to:

- Rewrite quite a bit
- Check the flow
- Check signposting
- Check links made

Reading your revised text aloud is a useful technique.

**Ref:** Cayley, R (2011) *Reverse Outlines*, Explorations of Style [online blog] downloaded from: <https://explorationsofstyle.com/2011/02/09/reverse-outlines/> 21 April 2020