Reverse Outline

What It Is

A reverse outline is an outline that is created towards the end of the writing process rather than at the beginning. Instead of guiding the creation of the text, a reverse outline enables writers to analyze the effectiveness of what they have written.

What It Can Do

A reverse outline breaks down your paper into its main points so that you can check if your paragraphs support your thesis statement. It can also help clarify what text in your paragraphs is not supporting your thesis statement. It can help you make sure that your paper is doing what it's supposed to be doing—meeting assignment guidelines, covering all the intended content, including sources.

How to Create a Reverse Outline

Once you have written a complete draft, annotate it so that the main point of each paragraph is clearly identified next to each paragraph. Those annotations are your reverse outline. Based on the main point of each paragraph, determine if it holds up your thesis statement or lets it down and note that in your reverse outline.

A Sample Reverse Outline

- **Paragraph 1**: Introduction
    a. Thesis statement: Cats make better pets than dogs.
- **Paragraph 2**: Cats are lower maintenance and more affordable.
- **Paragraph 3**: Cats tend to be quieter and sleep more compared to dogs.
- **Paragraph 4**: The history and trends of household pets in America.
- **Paragraph 5**: Cats are small and can hunt at night with enhanced night vision.
- **Paragraph 6**: Rebuttal that cats can't be as loyal of companions as dogs.
- **Paragraph 7**: Conclusion

How to Use a Reverse Outline

Eliminate text from your paragraphs or remove entire paragraphs that do not support your thesis statement. Take note of what needs to be changed. For example, **Paragraph 4** above seems outside the thesis, and it's unclear how it relates to the paragraphs before and after it. **Paragraph 5** may be relevant but should be evaluated for its relationship to the thesis. **Paragraph 6** is a rebuttal to an argument that never appears in the text. Revise each paragraph to address these issues as noted in the reverse outline.

Template for a Reverse Outline

The following template may be used to create and use a reverse outline effectively. After identifying the main point of each paragraph, note how it supports or detracts from the thesis statement and indicate any ideas for revision. Add body paragraph rows as needed.

Reverse Outline				
Paragraph	Main Point	How it supports my thesis statement	How it detracts from my thesis statement	Ideas for revision
Introduction				
Body Paragraph 1				
Body Paragraph 2				
Body Paragraph 3				
Body Paragraph 4				
Conclusion				