

Paragraph-by-Paragraph Outlines

1. Number each paragraph.
2. On a separate sheet of paper, write down the number for a paragraph and then write beside it **the main idea(s) of the paragraph**. Starting with the introduction, do this for every paragraph in the essay. If the introduction is too complex to simplify to a single statement, write "Introduction" and copy out the thesis statement (if the essay has one). If the conclusion is too complex to simplify, just write "Conclusion."

If a paragraph seems to have more than one main idea, write them all down, one idea per sentence.

You do not have to copy a sentence from the paragraph. In fact, it is generally best if you don't. Try to boil down complex ideas to one, simple, direct statement. Replace sophisticated writing with a plain-language sentence.

Do not agonize over exactly how to phrase a main idea. If the paragraph is messy, a concise statement of a main idea may be impossible. Give it your best shot, remembering that the point of this exercise is to check the organization of the essay.

Writing single words instead of main idea sentences is not good enough. You want to see how one idea relates to another, and by looking at two single words such as "abuse" and "language," you cannot tell how they relate in the essay. Furthermore, if you write out full sentences, they may easily turn into topic sentences that you can use in your essay.

3. Once you have written the main idea(s) for each paragraph, read through the list of ideas to **check the organization** by asking the following (not necessarily in this order):
 - Is the organization one the readers would expect? If not, is it one that they can follow reading the paper at high speed and for the first time? (Ask someone.)
 - Does the organization fit with the thesis statement?
 - If the organization is adequate, is there a more effective way to organize the parts?
 - Is it balanced? That is, does the paper spend as much space on each area as the assignment or thesis suggests it should? Also, do points of equal weight receive

approximately equal space? (Go back to the paper and count pages or measure space if you have to.)

- 📁 Should some paragraphs be combined?
- 📁 Should some paragraphs be broken into smaller paragraphs? (Look for places in your paragraph-by-paragraph outline where you have more than one sentence written for a paragraph. Sometimes these should be separate paragraphs.)

4. **Revise.** If there are not too many changes, make them directly on your rough draft, and re-type. If major organizational changes are required, write a formal outline to guide your revisions.

ASC 2011