

## Reverse Outlining

This method is particularly useful when you have a paper that isn't flowing as it ought to, doesn't appear to be organized, or is missing important information and/or connections. For reverse outlining, then, you *must* already have a draft that you are working to improve. As opposed to standard outlining where you create a draft from the outline, reverse outlining creates an outline from the draft.

*How it works:*

You look carefully at each paragraph of your essay and outline the main ideas there. What your topic sentence is, for example, becomes the "theme" or "subject" of that paragraph. You then look to see if you have evidence, analysis, and clear connections, making a note of what is and is not present:

Because the wealthy Lady Lodestone follows social dictates and relies on men like Compass for advice, her standing is better than many of her fellow early modern widows. At the same time, however, due to her status as a widow, her household must toe a line of proper comportment to avoid pitfalls that would otherwise go largely ignored in a couple's home. Garthine Walker explains that a "properly governed household was characterised by orderly and appropriate conduct within it, with due authority and deference being displayed as precise relationships demanded, and the absence of illicit alliances of all kinds" (11). Thus, Lady Loadstone's household is likely to be even more critically viewed in light of this relationship and Lady Loadstone's status within the community. Therefore, coupling her "niece's" unwed pregnancy with the fact that this is a widow's home, a jury might determine that Mistress Polish's residence allowed for continued concealment of her crime.

Notice there is not a very clear topic sentence. Why is this information important? We don't know!

This evidence isn't connected clearly to what has come before.

The analysis of the evidence is weak.

A reverse outline for this paragraph might look like this one:

- A) **Topic:** wealthy widow, social status – not clear
  - a. **Evidence** – a quote from Walker's book (add title?)
  - b. **Analysis** of quote – needs a better link to wealth and status
  - c. **Wrap-Up** for paragraph is pretty strong

Pro-tip: It may seem weird, but color coding your paragraphs can help! Also note that this example is from an English lit paper. Your professor may have other genre conventions she, they, or he want you to use as you write.

Then, by using that reverse outline to revamp the paragraph for a stronger structure, we can create a new one:

It is important to note that society's views of widows were far less trusting than is indicated by Jonson's apparently unblemished character, Lady Loadstone. Because this wealthy lady follows social dictates and relies on men like Compass for advice, her standing is better than many of her fellow early modern widows. At the same time, however, due to her status as a widow, her household must toe a line of proper comportment to avoid pitfalls that would otherwise go largely ignored in a couple's home. Garthine Walker, in her text *Crime, Gender, and Social Order in Early Modern England*, explains the importance of household order, writing that a "properly governed household was characterised by orderly and appropriate conduct within it, with due authority and deference being displayed as precise relationships demanded, and the absence of illicit alliances of all kinds" (11). Thus, while Lady Loadstone's household could be judged harshly -- even if it had a man at the helm -- due to the illicit alliance between the replaced Placentia and her child's unnamed father, it is likely to be even more critically viewed in light of this relationship and Lady Loadstone's status within the community. Therefore, coupling her "niece's" unwed pregnancy with the fact that this is a widow's home, a jury might determine that Mistress Polish's residence allowed for continued concealment of her crime.