ESSAY: 7-9 pages (1750-2250 words) + a 10 source annotated bibliography

Your research will be situated around the creative approaches and representational questions that you are raising within your project. This paper should be rooted in your increasing knowledge of media history, theory and formal analysis, with particular consideration to strategies that other artists and media creators have taken when addressing themes or using formal methods that relate to your creative project. You may find yourself also engaging with sources from closely related fields and art forms such as art history, gender and sexuality studies, visual anthropology, music, performance art, theater, etc. This is fine, so long as your primary mode of inquiry is rooted in media studies. Remember that you should draw on media analysis skills from Fall’s “Film Moments” essays and Winter’s seminar tickets.

REVERSE OUTLINING PROCESS

In class on May 5, you will work with 1-2 partners on developing reverse outlines from drafts using the attached worksheet.

Due in one week, May 12:

A. Your own reverse outline in the form of a series of topic sentences, numbered in the order they appear. You may use topics and subtopics to communicate the structure and/or include additional notes. Remember that your reverse outline should summarize what you have already written. (See more detailed guidelines below.)

B. Your own revised outline that you create by re-ordering and refining the reverse outline. This should be a guide to revisions you plan to do to improve your essay’s argument and structure. Refer back to the handout on outlining (Research Essay Assignment [part 2], downloadable from the Syllabus+Assignments page on Wordpress) for further guidance.

Source: “Reverse Outlines: A Writer’s Technique for Examining Organization” by the UW Madison Writing Center (http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/ReverseOutlines.html)

Many writers use a reverse outline to check their work. Reverse outlining is a process whereby you take away all of the supporting writing and are left with a paper’s main points or main ideas, sometimes represented by your paper’s topic sentences. Your reverse outline provides a bullet-point view of your paper’s structure because you are looking at the main points of the paper you wrote.

Experienced writers, especially when writing longer papers about a complex subject, need ways to test their drafts for the logical sequence of points: its structure. A reverse outline allows writers to read a condensed version of what they wrote, and provides one good way to examine and produce a successful paper.
A reverse outline can help you:

- Determine if your paper meets its goal
- Discover places to expand on your evidence or analysis
- See where readers might be tripped up by your organization or structure

**How to create a reverse outline**

1. **Start with a complete draft** to have a fuller picture of the plan you carried out. You can use a partial draft to review the organization of the paragraphs you have written so far.

2. **Construct the outline** by listing the main idea of each paragraph in your draft in a blank document. If a paragraph’s topic sentence provides a succinct version of the paragraph’s argument, you can paste that sentence into the outline as a summary for that paragraph. Otherwise, write a one-sentence summary to express the main point of the paragraph.

3. **Number your list** for ease of reference.

**Use your reverse outline to answer questions**

**Does every paragraph relate back to your main idea?**

Your reverse outline will help you think more effectively about your paper’s focus: its big picture. Does every item on your list relate back to your main point?

Many writers find that new ideas or topics appear near the end of a reverse outline. These topic shifts may signal that you need to revise certain paragraphs in your draft to be sure they relate back to your main idea, or they may inspire you to revise your main idea so it takes on some of the new points these paragraphs suggest.

By viewing the structure of your paper from the vantage of a reverse outline, you can make productive decisions about whether to keep certain paragraphs or cut them from a draft.

**Where might a reader have trouble following the order of your ideas?**

You can use a reverse outline to review a paper’s organization or structure and then make strategic choices for rearranging the paper on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis, or for adding or removing paragraphs to improve organization.

**Do several of your paragraphs repeat one idea?**

If your reverse outline shows two paragraphs that make similar points, consider combining them or revising one so that it does not make too similar a point.

**Does one paragraph juggle several topics?**

If one item on your reverse outline discusses more topics than other paragraphs, that may be a paragraph your reader will struggle to follow. By dividing its topics into two or more paragraphs, each one discussing a more focused topic or set of topics, you may be able to ensure that your reader follows your meaning.
Are your paragraphs too long? Too short?

By comparing total paragraphs to total pages, you can learn your average paragraph length and more easily spot paragraphs that are unusually long or short.

An example of a reverse outline

For example: say you are writing a paper for an engineering class in which you are exploring the concept of how humans learn to trust technology through individual consumer choices, and your research involves analyzing several television commercials for Apple computers and products.

1. Ever since Apple's 1984 Super Bowl commercial, customers have seen Apple as creating technology that appeals to our individuality.

2. Over time, Apple has introduced a variety of devices that appeal to our sense of individuality and in our need to connect with other individuals and to our world.

3. With the introduction of the iPod in 2001, Apple began exploring ways to win consumer trust in technology by focusing on how humans can determine the ways they choose to use the technology they purchase.

4. With the opening of Apple stores, Apple began to offer yet another way to explore our trust issues with technology through talking to friendly individual sales people in clean, well-lit stores.

5. In 2007, Apple rolls out the "Hi, I'm a Mac, and I'm a PC" TV commercials thus showing the funny side of Apple ads.

6. Apple's more recent TV commercials show how it easy it is for consumer to maintain their individuality and to trust in Apple's new technological offerings, most notably, the iPhone line.

7. Apple continues to explore the human connection with technology through their developments and applications of voice-activation and speech technology, which serve to bring out a more intimate, individual experience with their technology.

Take a look at this reverse outline above. What do you see? Most sentences address some aspect of how human trust evolves with Apple's technological developments, and these choices are individual choices.

However, sentence (5) stands out: Why? Sentence (5), based on the topic sentence, only treats the humor without connecting the way humor can help us alleviate some of our trust issues with technology as individual consumers. What can you do? As the writer, you may need to revise the paragraph to directly connect with the paper's argument, or, if you determine that the paragraph is serving an important part of your paper's argument, then you may merely need to revise topic sentence (5), perhaps like this:

In 2007, Apple rolls out the "Hi, I'm a Mac, and I'm a PC" TV commercials, and by promoting their funny side, Apple ads help another generation of consumers get over their "trust issues" with Macs by personifying the choices they make as individual personality types and the technologies they are willing to trust.
Reverse Outline Worksheet

Go through your paper and underline 1) the thesis statement and 2) the first sentence in each paragraph

Thesis exercises:

1. Circle words in your thesis statement that are still too general or vague, and are therefore still functioning as “place-holders” in your argument.

2. Box the verbs in your thesis statement. Are the verbs active or passive? Does the thesis rely heavily upon forms of the verb “to be?” (i.e. “is” and “are”). If the verbs are passive, think of ways to make them more active. Try altering the agency of the sentences.

   Example:
   Alice’s sister is unable to escape into a world of fantasy.
   → The sister’s maturity and her ability to reflect on the future prevent her from escaping into a world of fantasy.

   ***Write alternatives for any passive verbs/sentences in the margins.

3. Does the thesis make an assertion not only about what the author, the text, or a character does, but how s/he/it does it?

   Example:
   James implies that reading requires intimacy.
   → James’s application of sexualized language to the act of reading implies that it requires intimacy.

   ***If your thesis doesn’t do this, write “HOW” in the margins.

4. Does the thesis make an assertion not only about what the author, the text, or a character does, but why or to what ultimate effect s/he/it does it?

   Example:
   The narrator extracts Berenice’s teeth.
   → The narrator extracts Berenice’s teeth in an attempt to subordinate the physical to the abstract.
   James confronts the reader with a ‘figure’ made up of irreconcilable metaphors.
   → James confronts the reader with a ‘figure’ made up of irreconcilable metaphors, so that the reader attempts to be like Corvick, rather than like the narrator.

   ***If your thesis doesn’t do this, write “WHY” in the margins and move on.

5. Does the thesis push itself to address the significance of its assertions in relation to the text as a whole? Does it answer the “so what” question?

   Example:
   James confronts the reader with a ‘figure’ made up of irreconcilable metaphors, so that the reader attempts to be like Corvick, rather than like the narrator.
   → James confronts the reader with a ‘figure’ made up of irreconcilable metaphors, so that the reader attempts to be like Corvick, rather than like the narrator. The attempt is fruitless, however, because the story is an ambush; the positions of the initiated and the uninitiated are ultimately interchangeable.

   ***If your thesis doesn’t do this, write “SO WHAT?” in the margins.

OVER
**Reverse Outline Exercises:**

Go through your paper from start to finish, but read *only the underlined* sentences (i.e., the thesis and the first sentence of each paragraph). Do this twice. *Note: You may find it useful to write the thesis and underlined paragraph topics onto a separate page, so that you can examine their relationship more without the distraction of other text.*

Then consider the following *bolded* questions. (Don’t worry about the text underneath each question just yet). If the answer to any of the questions is “no” for any of the sentences, take note of it in the margin beside the sentence.

7. **Do each of the sentences make an assertion rather than offering an observation or a summary of the story’s plot?**

   If not, it’s possibly because your thesis does not answer the “why” and/or “so what” questions. Making your thesis address these questions will enable you to organize your essay around the *logic of the thesis* rather than the *chronology of the story*. Redraft the thesis with these questions in mind and see if it enables you to break the argument down into logical steps rather than plot summary.

8. **Do each of the sentences accurately represent the argument the paragraph goes on to advance?**

   If not, it’s possibly because your topic sentence is somewhere else in the paragraph. Can you find the topic sentence? Would it be more effective at the top of the paragraph? (In most cases it will). If so, move it. It’s also possible that your paragraph does not have a clearly defined focus, and that’s why your topic sentence does not accurately represent what follows. If this is the case, you need to further define the focus of the paragraph. What assertion do you need to advance in this paragraph in order to advance your argument from the paragraph before, and in order to pave the way for the next paragraph? Eliminate any sentences/evidence that do not advance this point or, if they are necessary to the argument as a whole, move them into (a) paragraph(s) of their own.

9. **Do each of the sentences relate clearly to the thesis statement?**

   If not, it’s either because the main assertion of the paragraph does not relate clearly to the thesis or because the topic sentence does not adequately reflect how the assertion *does* relate to the thesis. If the paragraph does not relate to the thesis, it should not be in the paper. If the paragraph *does* relate, alter the sentence so that it brings the paragraph into a clear relation with the thesis.

10. **Do each of the sentences advance logically from the sentence before?**

    If not, it’s either because the main assertion of the paragraph does not follow logically from the main assertion of the paragraph before, or because the topic sentence does not adequately reflect how the main assertion *does* relate to the thesis. If the main assertion of the paragraph does not follow logically from the one before, it needs to. This may mean throwing the paragraph out, revising it so that it builds upon the ideas of the previous paragraph, or adding another paragraph in between the two paragraphs in order to bridge the gap in logic.