



Revision Exercise: Color Coding and the “Reverse” or Descriptive Outline

The purpose of both of the following exercises is to help you revise your paper for overall unity, coherence, and completion of paragraphs and ideas. You will need a few tools before you begin: 1) a clean copy of one of your drafts; 2) four different highlighter markers; 3) one or two blank sheets of paper.

Color Coding

In this exercise, you will highlight the main “parts” of your paper according to the following: criteria. Doing so will help you see what areas need work and where you might begin the process of revision. Choose one highlighter for each of the following, and highlight accordingly. :

- Thesis: Highlight your thesis statement and anywhere you restate the thesis in the paper (in the form of a claim or a topic sentence).
- Evidence: Highlight quotes you use that are directly related to this thesis (you may also be using other evidence in your paper--examples drawn from personal experiences or generally known/common knowledge information).
- Exposition: Highlight the areas where you explain and interpret the evidence you use--the places where you show how a particular piece of evidence helps prove your thesis.
- Transitions: Highlight sentences, words, and phrases that help move your essay along and connect idea to idea, sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph,

The “Reverse” or Descriptive Outline

You've all probably done outlines as part of the planning stages for papers you are going to write. The idea here is to look at what you've already written and break down the essay into its components to better see what you have in terms of strengths and weaknesses. The steps to doing the reverse outline are as follows:

1. In the margins of a clean copy of your paper, number your paragraphs.
2. On a separate sheet of paper, going paragraph by paragraph, write down a list of the main ideas of your essay. Basically, you should be paraphrasing each argument or claim made in the essay.
For example:
 - Paragraph #1 is about how skin color determines and defines the American dream
 - Paragraph #2 talks about the failure of the American dream for immigrants
3. The next step is to DIAGRAM your paragraphs--to write down what is happening in each paragraph. If you have color coded your essay, you'll have this to help guide you here as well.
For example:
 - Paragraph #1: topic sentence with transition, claim, evidence, exposition
 - Paragraph #2: no topic sentence, transition, evidence, evidence, evidence, transition
4. As you look at your essay broken into these parts, evaluate whether each criteria is doing what you intended for it to do. For example, is what you've marked “evidence” in your second paragraph really evidence that relates to the thesis? If not, note this in the margin of your paper. Do you have exposition in each paragraph? If not, note where you'll need to develop the use of your evidence.
5. Finally, now that you can see the paper as “parts” and not as a whole, consider how your essay might work better if you reorganized it. For example, if you see the same point being made in three different paragraphs, these points should be gathered together (with redundancies edited out) and the main idea developed into its own paragraph. On a larger scale, you might see, for example, that a paragraph towards the end of the essay works better right after your introduction (or vice versa).