



WRITER'S STUDIO RESOURCES:



REVERSE OUTLINE

What is a Reverse Outline?

A Reverse Outline is when you create an outline from a finished paper. While a regular outline is used as a prewriting tool to help writers get organized, a reverse outline is used after the paper is written to help with revision.

Revising with Outlines

Outlines are great for essay planning, but they can also help with revision. You can create an outline from your essay draft by reverse outlining.

1. Start by briefly summarizing the main points of each body paragraph in the margins (if you are having trouble coming up with a short summary, that's a sign your paragraph lacks focus and is addressing too many topics).
2. Compile your paragraph summaries in order with your thesis statement at the top.
3. List pieces of evidence for each paragraph under their summaries.



Pro Tip! Writing a reverse outline for the articles you have researched helps you better evaluate and understand your sources!

Now you have an outline of your essay draft! You can use this to evaluate the strength of your argument and your paper's organization.

Once you've created a reverse outline, ask yourself the following:

- **Does each paragraph relate back to your thesis?** If not, your body paragraphs have either strayed off topic, or your thesis is too simple.
- **Is there a logical flow to your argument?** If not, try rearranging your paragraph topics to create a better progression for your argument.
- **Do any paragraphs address more than one topic?** If yes, split up the topics into separate paragraphs. Each paragraph should focus on one main idea.
- **Do multiple paragraphs repeat the same or similar ideas?** If yes, combine these paragraphs and/or cut out repetitive information.
- **Can any of your paragraphs be moved around without changing your argument?** If yes, you need to work on integrating the ideas between your paragraphs. Each paragraph should be carefully placed to build up your argument, each idea leading into the next.
- **Do any paragraphs need to be expanded with more support/evidence/analysis?** If yes, go back and do more research to find additional evidence or include more of your own thoughts and analysis to strengthen the paragraph.



Reverse Outlining Example

In this example, see how the main focus of each paragraph is explained and evidence listed.

In *I Am Legend*, the majority of the novel follows Robert Neville as the last living human being on earth (so far as he knows). Especially in the early parts of the book, Neville frequently talks to himself, almost as if he had a split personality, due to his extreme isolation. The extent of his loneliness and desperation for companionship gains a sharp focus halfway through the novel when a scrawny dog shows up, somehow having survived the plague, and Neville becomes desperate to have it in the house. He chases after the dog, calling to it without noticing "the shrill quiver of hysteria in his voice" (Matheson 94), and later prays for the dog's safety, though he lost his religion long ago, "because he wanted the dog, because he needed the dog" (97). This and other moments within the book highlight Neville's forcibly solitary lifestyle and the negative effects of extreme isolation on humans.

At a basic level, isolation and even plain loneliness have been found to have a negative impact on people's health that is "on par with smoking and obesity" (Edmonds). Loneliness causes stress and an immune response in the body which can "increase cancerous tumor growth" (Edmonds), cause high blood pressure, increase the risk of infection and developing Alzheimer's and dementia, and interfere with "sleep patterns, attention, and logical and verbal reasoning" (Bond). While there is no evidence of these physical effects of isolation on Neville within the novel, it's clear that the stress of his situation is taking its toll mentally. People who lived in extreme isolation for extended periods due to incarceration in foreign countries or other situations of solitary life, whether voluntary or involuntary, have reported visual and auditory hallucinations (Bond). Psychological experiments have been conducted to study these effects more closely, but have invariably had to be called off "due to the extreme and bizarre reactions of those involved" (Bond). Hallucinations would "start with points of light, lines or shapes, eventually evolving into bizarre scenes, such as squirrels marching with sacks over their shoulders or processions of eyeglasses filing down a street" (Bond). Subjects would also experience "anxiety, extreme emotions, paranoia and significant deterioration in their mental functioning" (Bond).

Psychologists believe these extreme reactions and mental deterioration are due to a lack of stimuli, the brain eventually creating its own stimuli and forming patterns out of the random firings of the nervous system (Bond). It has also been found that people who are lonely have less activity in the ventral striatum, which "plays an important role in learning," and in the temporoparietal junction, which is "associated with empathy" (Edmonds). This information is particularly intriguing when considering Neville's actions within the novel: in the beginning of the novel, we are introduced to a Robert Neville who has spent the past five months or so after the end of the world merely surviving without doing much of anything to learn more about the vampires and the plague which spawned them. Eventually he begins to conduct research and experiments to discover the exact nature of the plague and how and why various things are effective in repelling or destroying the vampires, but even then, he often becomes frustrated and abandons his research several times. Perhaps this could be due to a reduction in his cognitive faculties caused by his isolation. One theory, however, is that, at least from when he first sees Ruth onwards, it is all a hallucination conjured up by his socially deprived mind. Perhaps his brain invents the idea of people learning to cope with the bacteria and beginning to build a new society, because he is so desperate for companionship.

I. Isolation in *I Am Legend*

Talks to self

The dog

II. Physical and Mental symptoms of isolation

Stress, tumors, high blood pressure

Disrupt sleep and reasoning

Hallucinations

III. Neville's symptoms

Reduced learning and empathy

Lack of motivation

Abandons research