BACKWARDS OUTLINING

It’s outlining... in reverse!

Why You Should Backwards Outline:

• Allows you to consider your essay from a bird’s eye view after having focused on the micro-level details for so long while writing it
• Great means of checking to make sure the overall structure of your essay flows nicely
• Really easy and really helpful

When to Backwards Outline:

• You’re stuck in the middle of writing an essay, and are unsure what the next logical step is, because this technique gives you a sense of how your essay is progressing in the big picture sense
• You’re done writing your essay, you've spent a ton of time choosing precisely the right words to use in each sentence, and now it’s time to reflect on the strength of the essay’s overall structure.

How to Backwards Outline:

• To begin, think of the outlining techniques you were taught long ago (that some people still use) when you begin to write a paper. This is just like that, only easier, because you’re using material you've already written to create it.
• Start by considering your intro paragraph and, on a separate piece of paper, write out your thesis statement. This should act as the guide to the rest of the outline: each body paragraph should somehow logically correspond to your thesis.
• Next, go through each body paragraph and summarize it in one to two sentences. (If it takes more than a couple sentences to do this, consider breaking up your paragraph) Write these out in bullet points.
• Finally, write out an abbreviated version of your conclusion: what is the main point you want to leave your reader with?
• Now you have a very basic reproduction of your essay. Go through each paragraph, and check that it
  o Has a strong direct correlation to your thesis statement, or is required to explain some facet of your thesis statement indirectly.
  o Fits well where it is, or doesn’t interrupt a logical train of thought. Does its placement in your essay make sense? Does its placement there strengthen your essay?

While backwards outlining is not necessary, it is a really beneficial tool that allows you to step out of your essay to consider its strengths and weaknesses. If you find that you
struggle with creating strong structure, or that you often get lost in the minuscule details of your paper, then give backwards outlining a try!