

The Descriptive Outline

Contributed by Sue Doe (with apologies to Richard McCrimmon)

Goal: To provide students with a tool for analyzing their own drafts and the drafts of peers. This outlining activity is similar to the backwards outline but the name makes more sense!

Using either their own, a peer's, or a published essay, students first number the paragraphs of the essay in the margin.

Students now use a piece of notebook paper and draw a line down the middle of the sheet of paper.

They count the number of paragraphs and draw enough horizontal lines to create a row for each paragraph. They write the number of the paragraph to the left of the appropriate row.

In the first box of the row, students DESCRIBE the substance of the paragraph in question—for instance that the paragraph provides support for the second reason given in support of the claim.

In the second box of the row, students EXPLAIN HOW the substance of the paragraph is accomplished or achieved—for instance, the first paragraph that provides support for the second reason does so through an illustration using personal evidence.

The same analysis and description is followed for the length of the essay.

Then students use a highlighter to draw lines between major sections of the essay. They then find descriptive words to apply to naming this section of the essay.

Having thoroughly analyzed the essay, now students are ready to provide constructive feedback to themselves or their partners. They can plainly see what they've got so far in a paper and can often more clearly also see what is missing.

A One-Paragraph Example

Para 5	Here the writer provides support for her second reason in support of her claim that schooling does more harm than good, saying it robs people of simple joys. She talks about the loss of her innocent love of storytelling.	The support is in the form of an illustration. Using a personal experience from the writer's life, she describes her love of family stories before she learned to call such stories "anthropology." Now she finds she can't hear a family story without thinking about what the story reflects about her culture.
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