

***DukeWrites* Enrichment Suite**

Essay structure, part one (1A)

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Hi, I'm Margaret Swezey, from the Duke Writing Studio, and this module is about using reverse outlining as a way to discover the structure of a paper. While you're at Duke, you'll most likely encounter a wide range of writing assignments in your different classes, including such things as annotated bibliographies, lab reports, literature reviews, and public policy memos.

Because of this diversity, it's difficult to give you general guidelines on how you should structure a paper. To understand the structure of a particular text, it can be helpful to do a reverse outline of it.

Sometimes people make an outline before they begin writing a paper, although not everybody does this or does it every time. Reverse outlines are different because they're made after the paper is written. Reverse outlining is a technique that has several different uses. Here, we use it to uncover the structure of a paper, including how the different parts fit together.

We'll be reverse outlining Stefani Zakutansky's paper, *Rehabilitation in Sierra Leone*, published in *Deliberations*, the journal first-year of undergraduate writing. Stefani's paper is an annotation of a photograph of children who are enjoying playing soccer despite their amputated limbs ~ by photographer Eric Miller. To see the photograph with the arrangement of the paragraphs around it, see the information on this module on the Sakai site.

A reverse outline identifies the main point of each paragraph, and I'll also be talking about how the paragraphs serve the main argument of the paper.

Paragraph one: Sierra Leone's tumultuous, violent past has largely created its present complex social fabric. In particular, Sierra Leone's recent civil war abruptly and drastically impacted the ways in which Sierra Leoneans lived, learned, and worked. Lasting from 1991 to 2002, the war began when the Revolutionary United Front, a small group of Sierra Leonean guerrillas, initiated a movement against the nation's corrupt government. Although the civil war featured battles between government and military powers, it principally affected the civilian population. The war pitted community member against community member, family against family, and friend against friend. Such a dramatic overturning of traditional relations called for the evolution of a new social makeup. Today, this war-ravaged country features a "visible world activated by forces concealed beneath the surface of discourse, object, and social relations". In Sierra

Leone, the war's legacies include unseen forces that shape the way people live out their lives, whether at the workplace, home, or field of play.

So, this paragraph provides background on the topic, including information about the civil war and its aftermath. So I'm just going to write the word background here because that's, that's the main point of the paragraph. If you wanted to you could also add something like civil war and its impact or something like that, but you don't need to do that.

Paragraph 2: As both a type of discourse and a framework for social relations, leisure in the post-war lives of Sierra Leoneans serves as a powerful source of insight into this society. More than simply referring to participation in sports or other activities, "Leisure is an important sphere of activity and reflexivity where people affirm what is socially valuable," including "community activity that confirm[s] one's social membership in a social group" and a "relatively autonomous sphere, where individuals can flesh out their own social identities".

In Sierra Leone, leisure thus appears capable of reconciling one's turbulent past with the present by offering opportunities for participants to redefine themselves and their communities. It presents an ideal outlet by which Sierra Leoneans can reclaim that which they have lost through war, whether it be a childhood or a sense of physical well-being and social adequacy.

This paragraph discusses leisure and makes the main claim of the paper, which is really about leisure, let's see, allowing participants to redefine themselves and their communities. And leisure presenting an ideal outlet by which Sierra Leoneans can reclaim that which they have lost through the war, whether it be a childhood or a sense of physical well-being and social adequacy.

So, what I would say here in terms of the notes is ~ I would say leisure is an ideal outlet for Sierra Leoneans...I was gonna ~ I want to make it short but ~ for Sierra Leoneans to recover from war.

If you want you can also write Main Claim. So a main claim is the argument that's developed in the rest of the paper. It doesn't have to be just one sentence. And it also doesn't have to go in a particular place, although in U.S. academic writing, it often goes early in a paper.

For example, in a shorter paper, it might go in the first or second paragraph, as in this paper. For more information on making effective claims, see the module on that topic.