Post-Draft Outlining and Checking

Not sure if your ideas are in the right order? Uncertain how to begin revising? These steps can help reveal the structure, unity, and development of a paper and provide a focus for revision.

1. Draw a line at the end of the introduction. (Is it after the first paragraph or are there more introductory paragraphs?)

2. Draw a line where the conclusion begins. (Is it at the last paragraph or before that?)

3. Underline the sentence in the introduction that best expresses your main point; underline the sentence in the conclusion that best expresses your main idea. If the more intriguing, more thoughtful, more precise idea is in the conclusion, revise your introduction/thesis to express it.

4. **Says/Does**: For each paragraph of the paper, write a brief note about the **content** and **purpose** of the paragraph:

   a. What is each paragraph **saying** or trying to say? (What’s its content in a nutshell?)

   b. What is each paragraph **doing** or trying to do? (What’s its purpose and function for the paper as a whole?)

   Some possible “does” statements for paragraphs (from Bruffee 166):
   
   - tells a story
   - lists
   - shows how something is done
   - reasons
   - describes
   - explains
   - compares
   - defines a term
   - gives examples
   - analyzes (takes something apart)
   - synthesizes (puts two or more ideas together, showing the relationship between them)
   - cites (refers to an authority)
   - evaluates (explains how good/limited something is or what it’s good for
   - offers a hypothesis
   - gives a history
   - projects a future

   c. Is what each paragraph says and does **an appropriate fit**, given the main point or focus of the paper and its overall plan?

   d. Does the paper include **counterarguments**, if appropriate?
If the paper is long, begin with the same find-the-main-point and “says/does” checking for the sections of the paper: What is each section trying to say and to do?

5. Are the sections or paragraphs of the paper arranged in a logical order, given the overall topic and focus? What’s the governing principle behind the order of the sections or paragraphs? Are you giving the reader what the reader needs first?

6. Does each section or paragraph clearly signal its focus or connection with the main point of the paper (perhaps in a topic sentence)? Taking them one by one, underline the signpost sentence, if any, for each section or paragraph:

   a. Does the signpost sentence fit with the paper’s focus or thesis as revised?
   
   b. Is it located in a position to help the reader (usually the beginning)?
   
   c. Does each paragraph of the section or each sentence of the paragraph relate to the signpost sentence?

7. Check for “CRED”: the claims, reasons, evidence, and details in each paragraph that support the paper’s main claim or point. Try to distinguish among claims, reasons, and evidence:

   When you ask yourself why your reader should agree with your main point, your responses are the reasons that support your claim.

   When you ask yourself why your reader should believe your reasons or you ask what your reasons are based on, that’s the evidence.

   It may be helpful to think of claims and reasons as ‘you talking’ and of evidence as ‘out there’ and existing independently of you.

   a. What claims and reasons are asserted in the paragraph? Underline them.
   
   b. Check for evidence: examples, quotations, data, and details that help develop the main idea and back up the reasons and claims. Mark them with a wavy underline.
   
   c. Is there evidence for each reason or at least a balance between reasons and evidence so that one or the other doesn’t predominate (too many reasons that aren’t backed up or too many quotations that aren’t explained)?