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Handout 1: Reverse Outlining

Additional Materials Needed
Students: a text to be revised

Learning Goals
At the close of the workshop, students will be able to:

- Identify and classify sentence-, paragraph-, and essay-level concerns.
- Describe the strategy of reverse outlining.
- Reverse outline an emerging text in order to identify a specific goal for revision.

Overview
In this workshop, three primary activities take place:

- Students describe concerns for their drafts in order to collaboratively distinguish between those on the essay, paragraph and sentence levels.
- Students practice reverse outlining a common text.
- Students reverse outline their own texts and utilize their findings to articulate precise revision goals.
Developing Revision Strategies Workshop

Name:__________________________________________________________

Entrance Ticket

This ticket will be used to help us understand what you already know coming into the workshop.

In this workshop, we will discuss three levels of textual concerns: sentence-level, paragraph-level, and essay-level. Please give an example of each:

• Sentence-level concern:

• Paragraph-level concern:

• Essay-level concern:

You were asked to bring in a text that you’d like to revise. Please name one goal you have for revising this draft.

Exit Ticket

This ticket will be used to help us understand what you learned in the workshop.

In this workshop, we discussed three levels of textual concerns: sentence-level, paragraph-level, and essay-level. Please give an example of each:

• Sentence-level concern:

• Paragraph-level concern:

• Essay-level concern:

You were asked to bring in a text that you’d like to revise. Please name one goal you have for revising this draft.
In this workshop, we discussed three levels of textual concerns: sentence-level, paragraph-level, and essay-level. Please give an example of each:

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<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student effectively identifies an example from one of the three categories of textual concerns:</td>
<td>Student effectively identifies an example from two of the three categories of textual concerns:</td>
<td>Student effectively identifies an example from all three categories of textual concerns:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Sentence level.</strong> Student may describe such primarily sentence-level issues as grammar, syntax, or sentence structure concerns; integrating or introducing quotes; refining a thesis statement; or citing correctly.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Paragraph level.</strong> Student may describe such primarily paragraph-level issues as depth of analysis; needing better transitions; finding a main idea; or developing topic sentences.</td>
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<td><strong>OR</strong></td>
<td><strong>AND/OR</strong></td>
<td><strong>AND</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Essay level.</strong> Student may describe such primarily essay-level issues as overall flow; finding a thesis; ordering paragraphs; or developing a conclusion.</td>
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You were asked to bring in a text that you’d like to revise. Please name one goal you have for revising this draft.

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<td>Student makes no recognizable attempt to articulate a revision goal.</td>
<td>Student attempts to identify a revision goal, but relies on vague or tautological verbs (e.g., to revise, to improve) and/or objects (e.g., the flow, my ideas).</td>
<td>Student articulates a precise goal beginning with a targeted verb (e.g., to re-sequence, to cut, to insert) and concluding with a specific and concrete object (e.g., my thesis statement, a new paragraph, repetitions).</td>
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Lesson Plan

Introduction
Frame this workshop as an opportunity to begin developing a more efficient and independent revision process. Emphasize that while students will work on a single draft (and thereby strengthen a specific paper), they will be practicing strategies to apply again and again.

Part One: Identifying Textual Concerns
1. **Ask all students to briefly introduce their drafts, and to describe what they wish to work on.** (Prompt as necessary with questions such as Where do you want to make changes? What’s troubling you about the current draft? What kind of feedback have you received on this paper? What do you hear about your writing again and again?)

2. **As students report their concerns and objectives, record them on the whiteboard, clustering them into three (as yet unlabeled) categories—essay-level, paragraph-level and sentence-level.** (A number of common concerns are categorized below. Be aware that some concerns may span two categories of scale; for instance, a thesis statement that requires complication will need sentence-level refinement even while that refinement impacts an essay-level revision. Throughout the workshop, use your best judgment in identifying the most salient level of scale in these cases.)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Essay-level</th>
<th>Paragraph-level</th>
<th>Sentence-level</th>
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<tr>
<td>• I’m not sure things “flow.”</td>
<td>• I need better transitions.</td>
<td>• I want to sound smarter or more fluent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• I’m repeating myself.</td>
<td>• I’m rambling; this paragraph has no main idea.</td>
<td>• I need to proofread better.</td>
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<td>• I don’t really have a thesis.</td>
<td>• I might have too much plot summary.</td>
<td>• I might have run-on sentences.</td>
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<td>• I’m over-relying on one source; I’m supposed to have a counter-argument.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• My professor says she can’t understand me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• I’m not sure everything is relevant.</td>
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3. **When a sufficient number of drafts are represented on the whiteboard, ask students to identify what unites the items of each cluster.** Thereby facilitate a brief discussion distinguishing between essay-level moves, those that are contained to a single paragraph at a time, and those that focus on individual word choice, syntax or punctuation. Label the clusters. Check for understanding by asking for a few more examples from each category.

4. **Ask students, “In what order might you address these categories—or in what order do you tend to address them in a writing center session?”** Elicit understanding of the efficiency of generally moving from the larger scale to the smaller, while acknowledging the interdependency of some higher-order and lower-order concerns (as with the thesis statement example above). Segue to Part Two: Note that in writing center sessions, we identify specific concerns like those on the board, and then address them with a targeted revision activity.
Part Two: Collaborative Reverse Outlining
1. Introduce one of the most common strategic revision activities used in the writing center: the reverse outline. Explain that:
   - Just like a planning outline, a reverse outline is a model of something larger and more complex.
   - As a model, it’s more easily examined or manipulated than the thing it represents.
   - So it’s used to identify what exists in a draft in order to strategically plan a revision.
2. Describe the method of reverse outlining: dividing a text into paragraphs and summarizing each in no more than a sentence. Distribute Handout 1, “Reverse Outlining,” and explain that after the excerpt from a student draft is read aloud, the group will summarize each paragraph together.
3. Facilitate the students’ collaborative summaries; record these statements on the whiteboard. Encourage declarative but comprehensive summaries like:
   - ¶ 1 Orwell’s simile and metaphor dehumanize the prisoner.
   - ¶ 2 Orwell personifies and animates the prisoner’s body parts.
   - ¶ 3 Orwell repeatedly identifies characters by their nationalities.

Observe to students that this text is relatively easy to summarize, and ask them to describe why. Elicit answers such as:
   - clear topic sentences (with key words like “in contrast” to signpost shifts in direction)
   - consistent content in each paragraph (with no tangents)
   - sentence-level clarity that makes for unambiguous meaning

Conclude discussion by reflecting on how this knowledge of the existing draft might shape revision. For example: So both the reverse outline itself and the process of making it tell us this writing is actually in pretty good shape, though it may need more transition between paragraphs 2 and 3.

Part Three: Independent Reverse Outlining
1. Ask students to select a portion of their own drafts to reverse outline. Explain that summary may not be as straightforward as it was in the model; allay anxiety by explaining that this experience is just as useful as a clear reverse outline: A messy paragraph that’s tough to summarize can reveal that you need to draft a clearer topic sentence, or to eliminate a tangent, or to break up a long paragraph into two.
2. Provide time for independent reading and writing. Make yourself available for one-to-one guidance.
3. Ask students to reflect on their findings in group discussion. As they do so, facilitate understanding of what their struggles and outlines might suggest as next steps, much as you would in a traditional writing center consultation. As possible, connect conversation to the initial concerns on the whiteboard, identified in Part One.
4. Wrap-up. Ask each student to articulate a precise goal going forward.
1. Orwell uses figurative language (simile and metaphor) to show that the prisoner is treated more like an animal than a human being. The cells of the condemned men, “a row of sheds…quite bare within,” are “like small animal cages” (366). The prisoner’s cry resounds like the “tolling of a bell” rather than a human “prayer or a cry for help” (369); after he is dead, the superintendent pokes at the body with a stick. Orwell thus establishes the lack of human concern for the condemned prisoner.

2. In contrast, Orwell emphasizes the “wrongness of cutting a life short” (368) by personifying the parts of the prisoner’s body as taking on human behavior. He describes how “the lock of hair danced” on the man’s scalp, how “his feet printed themselves on the wet gravel,” and how all his organs were “toiling away” like a team of laborers. In personifying these bodily features, Orwell forces readers to confront the prisoner’s humanity, to become more aware of the magic of life.

3. The hanging is, of course, an “unspeakable wrongness” (368). But Orwell’s description of it repeatedly—almost oppressively—identifies each character by his nationality. The hanging takes place in Burma in a jail run by a European army doctor and a native of southern India. The warders are also Indians, and the hangman is actually a fellow prisoner. From “a young Eurasian jailer” (367) to “a Burmese magistrate” (371), the participants in this strange injustice are presented to readers as coming from all over the colonial map.