

Descriptive Outlines

For most of us, making detailed outlines before we write are a waste of time. However, a descriptive outline, written when the paper is closer to being finished, can accomplish some valuable objectives.

- First, it provides writers with an opportunity to read their work closely and analyze both the meaning and the function of their organization in terms of their desired response from readers.
- Second, the process may help writers discover a more effective organizational pattern, lapses in meaning, and areas of repetition, irrelevance, or ineffectiveness.

Instructions for Writers

1. Before reading through your draft and making your outline, write down your thoughts on the following two issues:
 - In a sentence or two, say what you think your paper is about.
 - What thoughts and/or feelings do you want readers to have when they are finished reading your paper?
2. Divide your paper into paragraph or sense “chunks” and number each chunk in the margin. For each chunk of the paper, answer each of the following questions in a sentence or two:
 - What does this section say? (focus on content)
 - How does this section function rhetorically in terms of the whole piece? (focus on how the section relates, or doesn't, to the whole)
 - What do you want the reader to think or feel at this point? (focus on audience)
3. After completing the above process, answer these three questions:
 - What is your paper about?
 - Does it say what you thought it said initially?
 - As the reader of your own paper, what are you left thinking or feeling?

Instructions for Readers

1. Read the whole paper.
2. In response to each of the writer's chunks, write a sentence or two in response to each of the following questions:
 - What does this section say?
 - How does this section function rhetorically in terms of the whole piece?
 - What are you thinking or feeling at this point?
3. After completing the above process, write a sentence or two about each of the following:
 - What do you now understand this paper to be about?
 - What overall thoughts and/or feelings are you left with?
4. Send your descriptive outline via e-mail to your partner and to me **before** our next class meeting.