



The College of
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Document Title: Reverse Outlining a Published Article

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Course: BIONB 1220

Course Title: FWS: The Mind: From the Biological to the Artificial

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Fall 2018 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

The Knight Award for Writing Exercises recognizes excellence in short exercises and/or handouts designed to improve student writing. Appropriate topics may be drawn from the whole range of writing issues, large scale to small scale, such as development of theses, use of secondary sources, organization of evidence, awareness of audience, attention to sentence patterns (e.g., passive/active voice; coordination/ subordination), attention to diction, uses of punctuation, attention to mechanics (e.g., manuscript formats, apostrophes). Exercises and handouts may be developed for use in or out of class.

Submissions should comprise three parts: (1) A copy of the handouts or instructions that go to students. (2) An explanation of the exercise/ handout and of the principles behind it, addressed to future instructors who may use the material. (3) If possible, an example of a student response.

Submissions may range in length from one to four or five pages.

Winning entries will be deposited in a web accessible archive and made available to other instructors under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. (See creativecommons.org for more information about cc licensing. **No undergraduate student's writing will ever be published in this archive.**)

To facilitate future searching of the Institute's archive, we ask that you provide a brief descriptive abstract (about 75 words) of your document, and a short list of appropriate keywords that might not appear in the text. Examples might include terms like "rhetorical situation," "style," "citation," etc. **Any borrowings such as quotations from course texts or handbooks must be cited properly in the document itself.**

The two winning entries will receive \$350; second place winners (if any) will receive \$125.

Submissions are due in 101 McGraw Hall by Monday, December 17. No exceptions can be made.

Fall 2018 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

~Please Print Clearly. Do not staple. Use paper clips only~

Instructor's name RYAN J. POST

Dept & Course # BIONB 1220 Course title FWS: The Mind: From the Biological to the Artificial

Should I win a prize, I give the John S. Knight Institute permission to publish, quote from, and/or distribute copies of the writing exercises, and to distribute publicity to newspapers and other publications, local and/or national, about my winning the prize. I also grant the Knight Institute permission to deposit the writing exercises in a web accessible archive and make them available under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. I am prepared to send electronic versions of my text to Donna Newton (dlo1@cornell.edu) in the Knight Institute. I understand that I will receive the award for my prize-winning essay upon submission of the electronic text.

Reverse Outlining a Published Article

Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature

Ryan Post

Date

12/13/18

Fall 2018 Knight Award Submission

Ryan Post (rjp278@cornell.edu)

Course: BIONB 1220-101 “FWS: The Mind: From the Biological to the Artificial”

Explanation: The following is an in-class activity followed by a homework assignment designed to develop students' skills in the organization and logical progression of ideas in expository writing. In early essays, I found that many of my students had excellent ideas and interesting things to say about the prompt at hand, but often had trouble communicating these ideas in a manner that a naïve reader could easily follow. The structures of their essays were jumbled, with some concepts left under-explained and others repeated too often. To this end, I created an activity that asked students to consider a scientific article¹ paragraph-by-paragraph, asking for each paragraph (a) what main point the authors were attempting to convey; (b) what information is presented to contribute to this point; and (c) what the authors' strategy was for including this particular paragraph at this point in the piece. By building this “reverse outline” of a well-written published article, I hoped students would uncover the principles by which the authors organized and presented their ideas. For homework, students were asked to perform this same exercise on an essay they had previously submitted.

Abstract: With the goal of improving the organization of students' writing, this exercise asks students to create a *reverse outline* of the introductory section of a published article. For each paragraph, students must (a) give the paragraph a “title” conveying its main point; (b) in bullet-points, summarize key information the paragraph describes; and (c) determine what purpose this paragraph serves for the piece as a whole. For homework, students write a reverse outline of their essay.

Keywords: reverse outline, organization, structure

Works Cited

¹ Zhong, C. B., & Liljenquist, K. (2006). Washing away your sins: Threatened morality and physical cleansing. *Science*, 313(5792), 1451-1452.

The following two pages are the handouts given in-class.

Class 17 Worksheet: Reverse Outlining a Published Article

Context and Rationale

In many cases, students and professional writers alike struggle to find the best structure to organize their ideas. Especially when working up against a deadline, our ideas might simply fall onto the page with logical organization only an afterthought. Poor organization can make otherwise interesting arguments incoherent to your reader. To improve your skills of organization and essay structure, this assignment asks you to create a *reverse outline* of a published piece of work. You will work backwards in an attempt to understand why the authors of this article presented their ideas in the manner they did.

Assignment

Sometimes writers will develop a detailed outline before they begin their essay. These outlines act as a blueprint for the essay, including both the broad progression of ideas and, on the paragraph level, the information which will be most relevant at each point in the essay. In this activity, you'll retroactively apply an outline to a published piece of work, in this case "Washing away your sins: threatened morality and physical cleansing" by Zhong and Liljenquist. Such a process should give insight into the authors' thought process and allow you to better understand a technical piece of writing.

On the bottom of this sheet and onto the backside, write an outline for the article's introduction with one section per paragraph. I've provided an example for the second paragraph. Your outline should give each paragraph a **title** which captures the main thrust of the paragraph. In bullet points below the title, write what **information** the paragraph conveys. Finally, describe the **purpose** of the paragraph by writing what it is *doing* for the article as a whole. Why include this information at this point in the writing? What is the author's strategy?

Example:

- I. Physical cleansing in religious traditions (Title)
 - a. Cleansing of the conscience (figurative) is associated with cleansing of the body (literal)
 - b. Major religions, including Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism discipline bodily purity, tying together physical cleansing with cleansing of the soul (a&b: information conveyed)
 - c. Purpose: The authors are showing that throughout human history, various groups of people have tied together physical with figurative cleansing. The idea of "purity" is a human universal. (Purpose)

Homework: Reverse Outlining Your Own Work

Context and Rationale

Having completed a reverse outline for the introduction of Zhong & Liljenquist (2006), I'd like you now to return to your own writing and do the same. This practice should highlight how a naïve reader might interpret your essay and might highlight areas you could improve upon in subsequent drafts. You might find that some ideas are repeated too often throughout the essay and that others are underdeveloped or could be better placed elsewhere in the essay.

Assignment

Using the same instructions as for the in-class worksheet, develop a **reverse outline of your recently submitted first draft for Assignment 3**. For each paragraph, (a) create a **title** which captures the main thrust of the paragraph; (b) in bullet points below the title, write what **information** the paragraph conveys; and (c) describe the **purpose** of the paragraph by writing what it is *doing* for the article as a whole.

This homework assignment is due by next class.