

This first-year student essay was all about describing the most interesting person the student had met. And it ended up good but kind of disorganized. To do a Reverse Outline and figure out why (and what to do), the student did this:

1. Numbered each paragraph.
2. Wrote a one phrase description of what was in the paragraph.
3. Looked to see what ideas got separated or could go together better.
4. Decided on whether to keep or eliminate anything.

The Trapper

1. Introduction. Setting. Intro trapper.

In Montana there is a time-cut gorge of steep cliffs surrounded by a green belt embellished with wildlife. Flowing through the gorge is the Smith River, and on its banks in an old shepherd's wagon, lives a trapper. He is a man in his late seventies or early eighties who has picked a life of freedom and hardship that most twentieth-century men would never choose. His is a life chosen as an alternative to a fruitless existence in the city, waiting to die.

2. How the writer met the trapper.

I met this trapper a few summers ago while trout fishing with my father. We had just forded the river, down from an ancient Indian camp, and were crossing an open meadow of long grass when we came across him. He was bent over a trashcan that had been ripped apart, picking up the remnants of his winter provision of oatmeal, which he told us a bear had smashed.

3. Physical description of trapper.

His skin was darker than most men's and wrinkled by time and the elements. A week's growth of beard covered his face and on his head, over his almost shiny gray hair, he wore a small milky-gray hat. His feet were covered by work boots that were slightly lighter in color at the toes from wear, and his shirt was red and simple with a western cut. A pair of patched blue jeans was the finale of his daily attire.

4. Description of Scotty's life. [Who the heck is Scotty?]

He said he was a trapper, when asked, but I believe Scotty, who is called "the old man of the mountains" by most people, was a naturalist because as I grew to know him better, I learned that he was a man with an abundant love for all things that are wild and free, and that he only trapped because he had to--to survive.

5. Author's opinion of Scotty.

He lives a life few men will ever know and I admire and envy him because of it.

6. Scotty life easy.

At first glance his life looks easy--completely filled with endless moments of running free among the trees, flowers, and wildlife. However, that was Eden and man has long since fallen from grace.

7. *Scotty life hard.*

In winter Scotty is the only human being within miles of the Smith River Valley, and if Scotty should ever get hurt there would be no one to help him. Even if he died no one would know until the spring thaw.

8. *Scotty life hard.*

The wagon in which he lives is only large enough to accommodate a small stove and bed, and Scotty has to survive year-round without the basic American necessities of life--electricity, running water, or in summer, air conditioning. He even has to walk seven miles through all kinds of weather to pick up his mail because some city slicker thought his horse was a deer and shot it.

9. *Scotty life better than in city in rest home.*

Few men would want his life, but to Scotty it is heaven because all that awaits him in the city, where admittedly most men would rather be, is a rest home, a place where our society puts those persons it no longer finds useful or productive until their time comes to, as they say, expire.

10. *Scotty proud. Chosen different fate.*

However, Scotty is a proud man and he has chosen a different fate.

11. *Scotty chose no help. Life hard.*

He does not accept charity or even social security although he jokes about saving up his change to buy a jeep.

12. *Scotty life hard.*

His life is much harder than most men's. Just imagine having to walk seven miles through dense forest and deep snow just to pick up your mail.

13. *Writer opinion of choice.*

Still, for a man in Scotty's position, I believe it is the best possible life for which one could hope.

14. *Writer's grandfather.*

I know my own great grandfather was a man who shared Scotty's convictions, but grew fragile from age and an easy life in the city. Thus he was sentenced to a nursing home where he spent the last few years of his life caged in a wall-less bed and doomed to an existence without hope of new experiences or even the enjoyment of life. So, what was left eventually expired one night without a whimper.

What would you suggest he do to make this stronger?

- 1. What is his main point?**
- 2. When do we know it's his main point?**
- 3. How might he re-arrange it so that the main point is supported better?**
- 4. What else? For example... what to do with the grandfather?**

