
REVERSE-OUTLINING WORKBOOK

A Strategic Revision Tool for Crime and Romance Novels

A reverse outline is the single most objective self-editing tool in your arsenal. Unlike prospective outlines, a reverse outline is a diagnostic map created *from an existing draft*. By stripping away prose details and analyzing the actual structure on the page, you can identify logic gaps, pacing drops, and character inconsistencies before committing to costly professional editing or beta readers.

THE 7 STEPS OF REVERSE OUTLINING

- 1. Number Each Scene / Section:** Treat each scene as a distinct narrative unit.
- 2. Identify the Core Action (Plot):** Describe exactly what occurs on a physical level. Keep it to one clear sentence.
- 3. Track Story & Theme Integration:** What is the scene's emotional or narrative purpose? Does it support the theme?
- 4. Analyze Pacing & Stakes:** Is there rising conflict? Identify the specific stakes at risk (emotional, physical, professional).
- 5. Verify POV & Dialogue:** Ensure the viewpoint is consistent. Are the character voices distinct and active?
- 6. Create the Revised Outline:** Look at your completed log to diagnose pacing drops, plot holes, or trailing arcs.
- 7. Restructure & Rebuild:** Physically reorganize your manuscript file to match your newly refined plan.

GENRE CHECKPOINTS FOR REFRESHING YOUR DRAFT

- **THE DISTANCE PRINCIPLE:** Before starting your edit, wait a minimum of two weeks (ideally a month). This breaks the 'memory spell' and allows you to read what you actually wrote, rather than what you intended to write. Keep your writing muscles sharp by starting a new project or reading genre masterpieces.
- **CRIME & MYSTERY CHECKPOINT:** Ensure reveals feel *surprising but inevitable*. Lay clues and foreshadowing prior to the final act. Avoid starting with confusing high-action fight scenes or boring morning routines; begin with a scene that defines the protagonist's core traits and stakes.
- **ROMANCE CHECKPOINT:** Verify the emotional stakes. A romance is defined by what the lovers must sacrifice to be together. Ensure you have a major plot twist or romantic escalation right at the 50% midpoint to carry Act 2 momentum.
- **THE DARLINGS AUDIT:** If a favorite line or scene is cut and the story still holds together, it is a 'darling' and must be removed. Never delete permanently—paste cuts into a separate 'Deletions' file for future reuse.

SCENE-BY-SCENE REVERSE-OUTLINING LOG

Part 1: Chapters 1 to 10 — Print and fill out with a pen during your initial diagnostic read-through.

Chapter / Scene	Core Action (Plot) <i>What happens physically?</i>	Story & Theme <i>Internal arc & purpose</i>	Pacing & Stakes <i>What is at risk?</i>	POV & Dialogue <i>POV locked & voice check</i>
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

SCENE-BY-SCENE REVERSE-OUTLINING LOG

Part 2: Chapters 11 to 20 — Continue tracking your narrative logic and pacing here.

Chapter / Scene	Core Action (Plot) <i>What happens physically?</i>	Story & Theme <i>Internal arc & purpose</i>	Pacing & Stakes <i>What is at risk?</i>	POV & Dialogue <i>POV locked & voice check</i>
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				
20				

SCENE-BY-SCENE REVERSE-OUTLINING LOG

Blank Worksheet Page — Print as many copies of this unnumbered template as needed to map out your full novel.

Chapter / Scene	Core Action (Plot) <i>What happens physically?</i>	Story & Theme <i>Internal arc & purpose</i>	Pacing & Stakes <i>What is at risk?</i>	POV & Dialogue <i>POV locked & voice check</i>