Twitter Thread by Brittany P. Battle, PhD



Brittany P. Battle, PhD
@Dr_B_Pearl

Folks asked about my reverse outline process so here's a thread..
Simple concept, go through each substantive chapter & log the topic of each paragraph in one line. I do this by hand on a legal pad, so the description has to be super brief. 1/
#SocAF #PhDChat #AcademicChatter

> Reverse outlined my book manuscript today...highly recommend doing this for any manuscript. It allows you to see things you might not see otherwise and really consider the organization. #SocAF #AcademicChatter #PhDChat
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> — Brittany P. Battle, PhD (@Dr_B_Pearl) November 1, 2020

As I go, I write out the subheadings within the chapter with the title & a brief description of the content there (few words). I also note how many paragraphs of "set-up" are at the start of each chapter. 2/

For each paragraph, if it contains empirical data, I make a note of the case/example/quote..still only on a single line. This is indented under the paragraph topic line. For these lines, I wrote 'data' in the margin to flag where empirical data were included. 3/

I use post-it strips to flag things that I think of as I go...cite X or include Y example here or this needs to be fleshed out. 4/

Initially, this outline allows me to see where I'm light on data, when the set-up of sections isn't parallel (e.g. 3 paragraphs for one chapter and 5 for another), where I can include better examples, where my paragraphs are redundant or don't flow well one to the next. 5/

Now that this is done, I will cut the one line descriptions individually & do some visual mapping on a dry erase board, literally moving paragraphs or examples around, inserting new examples, or flagging where a new paragraph would go with a highlighted strip. 6/

I made two copies of the complete outline, so that I can use the original in that form, have one to cut, and one to copy again if needed/to cut paragraph strips from if they get loss/damaged. 7/

I learned the cutting & moving tip from my dissertation chair and am excited to use it for my book manuscript, as he's used it for his books. 8/

But the reverse outlining thing is also useful for article manuscripts. It allows you to much more easily see the whole paper - where reorganization is necessary, if the argument flows, what's redundant. 9/

Here's what the outline looks like. This is one subsection from one chapter. 10/

Here's the cutting part (excuse the sewing cutting board, my dry erase board is on the way). I move as necessary...reordering, moving to a new subsection or chapter, adding "strips" or deleting them entirely. I'll cut the data strips away from the topic strips if needed. 11/

I have a bunch of teeny magnets to hold the strips on the board. Then the moving begins. I'll use post-its or write directly on the board things that need to be addressed. 12/

I'll start doing one chapter at a time and then will zoom out to a couple at once, then finally having all 5 up there. I'll do the intro and conclusion once the substantive chapters are super tight. 13/

I highly recommend doing this by hand..I've tried on the computer, and not the same result. Only having one line really makes you parse down what the paragraph is about. If you can't do it in one line, there might be too much going on in the paragraph. 14/

It also allows you to handle the text which I think there is something to be said for...it's why I do my qualitative coding by hand. Maybe it's "not real," but it makes a difference for at least some folks. 15/

Try to do the entire outline in one sitting/day/as close together as possible. Seeing the entire thing at a single time makes a difference. Things jumped out at me that I'd just read 2 chapters ago. It's easier to see connections/redundancies. 16/

Color coding is useful also..once I start the next phase, I'm going to highlight different types of data/quotes from particular individuals in different colors. I'll easily see if there's too much from one person, or not enough examples from x type of hearing. 17/

Hope this is useful! Happy writing! 18/18