Techniques for a Reverse Outline

Reverse outlining can be a MAJOR aid in sorting out organizational difficulties or questions so you can strategize forward. It helps you see the trees for the forest, so to speak. Here is the technique Carla recommends.

1. Print a copy of your full document.
2. Grab a few sheets of blank paper (I like the 11x14) and a pen of your choice. (Computer is not recommended, but it will work in a pinch.)
3. Go through your printed document carefully, writing down the following things on the LEFT half of your blank paper:
   1. Headings
   2. Thesis Statement / Research Question
   3. Roadmaps
   4. Subheadings
   5. EVERY TOPIC SENTENCE
4. The trick here is NOT TO CHANGE ANYTHING while you are going through the document. Write down the first sentence of each paragraph exactly as it is, especially. If you see things you need to change (and you likely will), RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO CHANGE THEM RIGHT THEN. Instead, write yourself notes if you must on a wholly separate sheet of paper.
5. Once you have gone through the whole document and have an extensive reverse outline on the left half of your paper, then AND ONLY THEN go back through and, on the right hand side of your paper, craft it the way you want it to be. Pay careful attention to your paragraphs. Ask yourself: is each topic sentence addressing the main point of the paragraph and in some fashion obviously relating to the argument as a whole? Does the rest of the paragraph match?
6. When you get through both parts of the exercise, you should have a new outline. Go ahead and revise to match.