

Revision Tips

Revision and editing are important stages in the writing process. Both improve writing and make it clearer and more effective. It is best to have other people help with these steps, but writers can also do much of it by themselves. Remember that good revision and editing can take several hours to a few days.

Revision

Revision includes three major categories: content, organization, and style. During this stage, ignore grammar and usage mistakes. Make major changes; it is a waste of time to correct grammar and usage before revision. Be willing to admit when a section needs to be rewritten. Rather than agonize over how to keep what is written, save time by rewriting.

Content

- Reread the directions. Were they followed? If not, what needs to be fixed?
- Does the paper have a clear thesis? Does the thesis reflect the paper? If not, how can it be fixed? Read each paragraph and identify its major claim. Are there adequate facts, logic, and/or other data? Has the evidence been explained and interpreted? Consider the following activity:
 - Using four highlighters, highlight all direct quotes, paraphrases, summaries, and parenthetical citations in a different color.
 - Look back at the paper. How much text is uncolored? If there is too much white (the writer's own words, ideas, and explanations), then the paper may have too little evidence. If there is very little white, there are not enough of the writer's thoughts in the paper.
 - Look at the number of direct quotes. Direct quotes should be used only if the original says something in a unique way. If there are too many quotes, change some to paraphrases or summaries.
 - Look at each direct quote, summary, and paraphrase—they should all have parenthetical citations. If not, add them.

Organization

- Individual Paragraphs
 - Underline the topic sentence of each paragraph and write a paraphrase of it in the margin of the paper.
 - Starting with the first body paragraph, read the words in the margin and then read the paragraph one sentence at a time. Does each sentence in the paragraph relate to the margin idea/topic sentence? If not, move or delete it.
- Entire Paper
 - Underline the topic sentence of each paragraph and write a paraphrase in the margin.
 - Read through the margin ideas. Are they in the same order as the thesis implies? They need to be. Do the ideas have a logical organization (chronological, causal, etc.)? Move paragraphs if necessary.
 - If the paper is disorganized, use different highlighters to color each main idea; then, reorganize by color. Sometimes scissors and tape also work.
- Transitions: These connect ideas in the paper, inside and between paragraphs, so readers can follow it better (first, second, then, next, also, however, in addition, etc.). Underline all transitions and decide if they need improvement. See pp. 35-39 in *A Writer's Reference* for more ideas.
- Read your introduction and conclusion. Do they reflect the paper? Are they interesting and effective?

Style

- Diction: The two types of diction are formal and informal. Most college-level papers will require formal diction, which is similar to textbook writing (as opposed to journal entries).
- Tone: This is the attitude the paper communicates (angry, sarcastic, mad, professional, etc.). Make sure the tone is appropriate for the audience.
- Fair language: Use politically correct terms about groups, ethnicities, genders, etc.
- Word choice: Use words appropriately and beware of connotations they may have. If you are unsure of a word's meaning or connotation, look it up.
- Redundancy: This occurs when a word or phrase is used repetitively. Reading aloud will help writers to spot this, and they can then use a thesaurus or the synonym function in MS Word to fix repetitions (right click on a word and the program will give you some alternatives). Redundancy includes using two words to say one thing as in "and also" or "a pair of two."
- Avoid clichés (overused phrases), slang, and unnecessary words; these can confuse readers and do not sound professional. Consider the following activity:
 - Read the paper out loud and listen for the items above.

Editing

During editing, the aim is to correct language (not content or organization). Always edit after revision because at this point writers should not be making major changes to the draft. The most important thing to do during an edit is READ OUT LOUD. The writer's ears will catch mistakes he missed. Similar to revision, be prepared to rewrite awkward sentences instead of fixing them. Writers can also ask others to read over the paper to help catch mistakes. Consider the following activity:

- Starting with the last sentence of the conclusion and working toward the introduction, read one sentence at a time out loud. This activity forces the writer to focus on language instead of content.

Sentence Structure

- Run-ons: These are long sentences that need punctuation. If the writer cannot read a sentence out loud without taking a breath, the sentence may be a run-on. Fix these by inserting commas, semicolons, and periods in the correct places.
- Fragments: These are incomplete sentences. All sentences should have a subject and a verb; if a sentence does not include a subject and a verb, it may need to be combined with another sentence or revised.

Spelling and Punctuation

- Run spell check and use the dictionary for unfamiliar words.
- Beware of basic rules concerning quotation marks, commas, capitalization, numbers, etc.
- Have several people help edit your draft for these items.

Format

- Follow the citation style guide in relation to page numbers, spacing, and referencing sources.