

Revising

“If there are things you aren’t satisfied with as a reader, go in and fix them as a writer: that’s revision.”

-Neil Gaiman

Revising is the process of improving the ideas, concepts, and organization of your paper. Whereas editing concerns sentence-level issues (like grammar and spelling), revising deals primarily with the content of your paper. You should therefore revise before you edit; it’s inefficient to fine-tune a sentence that will later be substantially changed or deleted.

BEFORE REVISING

Get some distance from your paper. It’s almost impossible to effectively evaluate ideas that you have just written. Taking some time away from your paper will help you better recognize your strengths and weaknesses. At the very least, get a good night’s sleep before returning to your first draft.

REVISIONS CHECKLIST:

- Ensure that the paper fully addresses the **prompt**.
- Address any **instructor comments** about content, ideas, or organization (usually the end comments).
- Locate your **thesis** and revise it if necessary (for more on this, see the “Thesis” handout).
- Check that the **content of your paragraphs** supports your thesis.
- Balance** your paper – cut parts that are irrelevant to the thesis; expand sections that are important to it.
- Organize** your paper so that it is logical and easy to follow.

STRATEGIES FOR REVISION

If you’ve read your paper so many times that you have a headache, you might need some fresh revision strategies. You can choose from the following techniques, depending on your problem areas.

1. **Make a reverse outline.** To make a reverse outline, write down your thesis, then number your paragraphs and make a note of the information/ideas contained in each. Once you’ve finished, you can evaluate the placement and order of your paragraphs and the way you transition between ideas. Reverse outlines are particularly helpful if your concerns involve **organization, transitions, balance, or flow**.
2. **Check your topic sentences.** Write down or highlight each of your topic sentences, then compare them one-by-one to your thesis. If any topic sentences do not seem relevant to the thesis, re-think those paragraphs. This is particularly helpful if your concerns involve your **thesis, flow, or clarity**.
3. **Ask a friend to read (but not comment on) your paper.** Then, ask them to summarize your argument back to you. Does their summary match what you were trying to argue? Does it address the assignment prompt? This exercise is particularly helpful if you are concerned about your **thesis, clarity, or balance**.
4. **Read the paper out loud.** Orally reading a paper can help you catch issues (like lengthy, confusing sentences, or a too-long introduction) that you might skim over in a written work. You can also combine this exercise with #3; read to a friend and have them summarize your main points back to you. This is particularly helpful if you are concerned about **balance, flow, or clarity**.
5. **Read your introduction and conclusion alongside each other.** If there’s no relationship between your introduction and conclusion, it’s likely that your paper has wandered off-topic. If they are exactly the same, there may not be enough depth to your argument. This is particularly helpful if you have concerns about your **introduction or conclusion** (obviously), but it can also help with **balance and organization**.

Editing

Editing – also called “proofreading” or “copyediting” – is the last step in revising your paper. Editing focuses on sentence-level concerns: things like grammar, punctuation, sentence clarity, spelling, and citation. Unlike large-scale revisions, editing ensure that a paper is stylistically elegant, grammatically correct, and formatted according to accepted disciplinary conventions.

BEFORE EDITING

- Revise. (See the other side of this handout).
- Be familiar with disciplinary formatting and style conventions.
- Know your instructor’s stylistic requirements (for example: is “I” allowed?).
- Use a grammar handbook to refresh any hazy memories of grammar rules (like semi-colon usage).

EDITING CHECKLIST

- Fix **spelling errors** and **typos**.
- Address any issues with **grammar** and **punctuation**.
- Make your sentences as **clear and concise** as possible.
- Ensure that your **citations** are accurate and correctly formatted.

STRATEGIES FOR EDITING

1. **Know your weaknesses.** Knowing that you often overuse commas or tend to mix up “affect” and “effect” will help you focus your editing. If the latter is a problem for you, for example, you might use the “Find” function on word to locate each of those words and make sure it is used correctly.
2. **Read your paper out loud.** Our ear can often pick up problems that our eyes do not. Issues like subject/verb agreement, run-on sentences, and awkward phrasing stand out when read aloud.
3. **Print a copy of your paper.** Besides giving your eyes a break from staring at your computer screen, looking at your paper in a different format will help you more easily catch typos and mistakes.
4. **Look for verb problems.** Verb choice and agreement is a common issue that affects meaning and clarity. Make sure each verb in a sentence corresponds clearly with one subject, and check your verb tense. Stylistically, try to eliminate as many forms of “to be” from your writing as possible; they tend to indicate passive constructions that are wordy and often unclear. (The “Find” function can also be useful here).
5. **Check your citations.** In this semi-final draft, every outside source you use should be cited in both in-text and on your References page. Now is your chance to make sure that those citations make sense and that you are not missing any information. Remember: every in-text citation *must* clearly correspond to just one entry on your References page.
6. **Get feedback.** Have a friend, relative, or writing consultant read over your paper before you turn it in. They can help you catch typos, grammatical errors, or clarity issues. If you do have someone proofread your paper, make it the absolute *last* step in your writing process; you don’t want that person wasting time on things you could have easily fixed on your own.