

Revising and Editing

Revision is a vital part of the writing process. Many people revise sections of their essay as they write, but revising a complete draft is particularly useful because it gives you, the author, a chance to step back and look at your essay as a whole. With a finished draft, it is clearer whether or not the thesis is successful or the organization is logical.

When revising your own paper, there is an order of concern you should follow. You will use your time revising more efficiently if you focus on higher order concerns (like your thesis statement) before focusing on lower-level concerns (such as grammar).

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 our “Thesis Statements” 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.

Highest Level of Concern

Thesis Statement – A thesis statement focuses the essay by stating the main idea of the paper. It is often only one sentence in length, though it may be longer for some assignments and is usually found at the end of the introduction paragraph. You must make sure the thesis statement is present and clear. Is your thesis specific enough for the scope of your essay? Does your essay focus on supporting your thesis or does it wander?

Topic Sentences – A topic sentence is a sentence that indicates the main idea or thesis of a paragraph. You might think of it as a signpost for your readers -- or a headline -- something that alerts them to the most important, interpretive points in your essay. When revising you will want to ask yourself, “does each paragraph have a topic sentence clearly stating that paragraph’s main idea?” If paragraphs do not have a central point, or if the central point is not stated in a topic sentence, your audience will not understand the purpose of the information they are reading. If the topic sentences are present, is their relationship to your thesis clear?

Introduction and Conclusion – Read your introduction and conclusion without looking at the rest of the paper. Do they match? Sometimes authors start with one thesis and end up with another. Make sure ideas in your introduction and conclusion are consistent. Otherwise, your essay’s argument will not be consistent, and your readers will be confused.

Organization – Do you present ideas in a logical and clear manner? Are your main points connected and do they have a clear connection to your thesis? Check to see if ideas seem disconnected or if evidence falls under the wrong topic sentence. The better your organization, the more your reader will understand your essay’s content.

Support and Evidence – Does each paragraph have evidence or proof supporting the topic sentence? If a paragraph has a focus but no evidence, then the point is not support—it’s just opinion. Be sure to support each idea in your essay with specific details.

Secondary Level of Concern

Audience – Who is your audience? Is your essay appropriate for them? Your audience determines the tone and purpose of your essay. Take time to consider who your audience is and how they will read your essay.

Clarity – Will your essay be clear to your audience? Are all your ideas and terms clear and well defined? Remember, writing is a form of communication limited to what is on the page. Your readers cannot ask questions if they do not understand. Take time to explain each point. Ensure that your reader can understand exactly what you mean.

Citation and Documentation – Is all your (borrowed) evidence documented? It is plagiarism if you use quotes, paraphrasing, or other evidence without citations. Make sure all of your (borrowed) evidence is correctly cited using a standard citation style.

Lower Level of Concern

Grammar Punctuation, Spelling – Although mechanics such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling are at the bottom of the list of concerns, they are very necessary. If an essay has great ideas but cannot be understood by readers because of grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors, then the essay has failed. Be sure to pay close attention to these details in the drafts of your essay.

Proofreading and Formatting – Even the best typists may occasionally press the wrong key when typing quickly, so be sure to look over your essay one last time for typographical errors. This is also a good time to check your Document Design (font, spacing, margins, Header(s), Heading(s), essay title, etc.).

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 ensures that a paper is stylistically elegant, grammatically correct, and formatted according to accepted disciplinary conventions.

Before Editing

- Revise.
- Be familiar with disciplinary formatting and style conventions.
- Know your instructor’s stylistic requirements (for example: is “I” or “you” allowed?).
- Use a grammar handout 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. **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.
2. **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.
3. **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).

4. **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 andthat you are not missing any information. Remember: every in-text citation *must* clearly correspond to just one entry on your References page.
5. **Get feedback.** Have a writing consultant read over your paper before you turn it in. They can help you catch typos, grammatical errors, or clarity issues.