

Revision

“I'm not a very good writer, but I'm an excellent rewriter.”
-James A. Michener, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction

Revision is an important part of the writing process that can begin as soon as you have something on the page and continues until you decide your paper is finished and ready for proofreading. It is not concerned with fixing smaller errors like misspellings or grammar issues, but is instead focused on revising what you've written to improve things like organization, clarity, and thoroughness. It is an essential, though often overlooked, part of the writing process for new and experienced writers alike.

As you revise, try to look at your writing in the most objective way you can. Your goal is to find the areas that need the most improvement and implement revisions that would make the biggest difference from a reader's perspective. For many writers, revision is often the longest part of the writing process, even longer than drafting. So remember to leave enough time for revising and rewriting! Keep the tips below in mind as you get started.

Revision Tips

- Plan to edit. Don't get frustrated if, as you type the final period on your first draft, your thoughts are less, *“It's perfect just the way it is. So easy!”* and more, *“What a mess!”* First drafts are rarely (if ever) perfect, and will need some revising and rewriting. Make sure to leave time for this just as you would for drafting.
- Have someone else read your paper. Ask them if there were any parts that were confusing, vague, or didn't seem to flow logically from one idea to the next.
- Take a break from the paper for a few hours, then come back and edit with fresh eyes.
- Focus on editing one area of focus at a time. For instance, when editing to make sure your conclusion is appropriate, don't also try to tackle correcting the tone of your paper. Usually you will be faster and more thorough if you focus on just one thing at a time.
- Consider your reader. Seeing your writing through another person's eyes can be hard, but it will improve your paper astronomically. What would stand out to you as confusing, vague, or a leap in logic if you were reading your paper for the first time?

Now that you've looked at some approaches to use when editing, let's concentrate on what to watch out for. Use the checklist below as a guide to help you focus on some key areas as you edit.

Revision Checklist

Assignment Guidelines

- Does the paper include all of the expected sections? For example, if the guidelines ask you to include a “methods” section, as in a scientific paper, does your paper include one?
- Does the paper address everything it’s supposed to according to the assignment guidelines?
- If you need one, do you have a thesis statement? If you need one, does your paper make an argument?
- Have you met the expectations of the assignment guidelines? If you had to honestly grade your paper using the rubric, what areas could you find that need improvement?
- Have you included the required number of sources?

Content

- Is the main point of the paper clearly stated where readers will look for it?
- Is your introduction appropriate for your paper? Does it include everything a reader will expect?
- Does the paper have a clear audience with the right amount of background information to communicate with them effectively?
- Does each paragraph support the main idea of the paper and focus on one idea? Do your ideas and paragraphs flow logically from one to the next? (See our handout on Reverse Outlines for help with this)
- Do you use topic sentences to tell the reader where each paragraph is going?
- If necessary, have you used sources to back up your claims?
- Is your argument, discussion, or analysis convincing, thorough, thoughtful, and supported by evidence?
- Have you used an appropriate tone for your paper (formal, informal, persuasive, etc.)?
- Do you have unnecessary repetition of ideas? Is there any missing information that could help your readers follow your ideas?
- Is it clear who or what your pronouns are referring to?
- Is your conclusion appropriate for your paper? Does it include everything a reader will expect?

Sources

- Have you used the required number of sources? Were you thorough enough in your research?
- Have you integrated your sources into your paper well by discussing their importance and connecting them to your argument?

Conclusion

Now that you have a good sense of the revision process and know some important areas to focus on, we hope you feel confident about getting started on revising your own writing. Don’t be afraid to make big changes when needed, and don’t get discouraged. Just remember that good writing is usually the result of great revision.