



THE WRITING PROCESS

Guidelines for Revision

Revising is not merely correcting spelling errors, checking subject-verb agreement, and inserting commas. Though proofreading is part of the revision process, far more important is reading your draft to consider whether or not you have formulated an effective thesis, whether or not you have adequately supported your thesis, whether or not your writing is shaped so that your reader is able to follow the development of your thesis.

This aspect of revision—rethinking and reshaping your writing—is the most significant aspect of the revision process. In fact, you should expect to engage in this kind of revision repeatedly as you write because you will develop new insights as you compose your draft.

As you discover your message, clarify your ideas, and find your form, you may turn to a second kind of revision: a close examination of your paragraphs. Is the intention of each paragraph and its connection to your thesis clear? Is each paragraph sufficiently developed to serve its function in the writing? Does any paragraph contain irrelevant information?

Considering your paragraphs will lead you to examine your sentences. Is each sentence clear? Does sentence structure reveal relationships among your ideas? Are there words you can eliminate to tighten your sentences? Do your sentences have variety of length and structure? After these several cycles of revision, you are ready to proofread for correctness.

So you see that revising is an essential part of the writing process—rarely does any writer sit down and produce a finished piece of work in one draft. Revising is not a punishment invented by English teachers; it is a process which demands that you see your writing as a reader will see it so that you can shape your writing for a reader. Some techniques follow to guide you in your revision process.

HOW TO CRITIQUE YOUR ESSAY

Descriptive Analysis

- State your essay's main point. Ask yourself if your thesis expresses this point clearly.
- Examine each paragraph to check its connection to the thesis. First, paraphrase in one sentence the information that the paragraph contains, that is, what it says. Second, explain the function that the paragraph plays in developing the thesis, that is, what it does.
- Paragraphs may describe, narrate, list, explain, exemplify, compare, contrast, trace, analyze, synthesize, hypothesize, give a history, project the future, list reasons.

Evaluative Analysis: Consider your essay in terms of the following criteria.

- **Unity:** Does everything in your essay relate to your thesis?
- **Coherence:** Do paragraphs follow one another in a clear order? Have you used transitions between paragraphs? within paragraphs?
- **Development:** Are your points fully explained?
- **Style:** Are your ideas clearly expressed? Are they simply expressed, without unnecessary words, big words where smaller ones would do, or confusing word order?
- **Mechanics:** Is your essay in correct, edited English?

CHECKLIST BY CATEGORIES

Audience, Subject, Purpose

- Who am I writing this paper for?
- What does my reader already know about this subject? What do I want her/him to know?
- Why have I chosen to write about this subject? What particular aspect of this subject have I chosen to focus on, and why?
- What is the most important thing I want to say about this subject?
- Does what I want to say about the subject represent the thesis of my paper?
- How would I describe my purpose in this paper? Do I want to tell a story, describe, explain, compare, evaluate, or analyze?
- Are my intended audience, general subject, specific focus, and purpose evident in my first paragraph? If not, why not?

Organization

- How many specific points do I make about my subject?
- Did I overlap or repeat any points? Did I leave any points out or add some that aren't relevant to the main idea?
- How many paragraphs did I use to talk about each point?
- Why did I talk about them in this order? Should the order be changed?
- How did I get from one point to the next? What signposts did I give the reader?

Paragraphing: Ask these questions about each paragraph.

- What job is this paragraph supposed to do?
- How does it relate to the paragraphs before and after it? Have I used transition words to signal those relationships?
- What is the main point of this paragraph? Have I stated it clearly?
- Does every sentence in the paragraph relate to the main point? If not, do some sentences need to be moved to other paragraphs or to be developed into separate, additional paragraphs?
- Have I provided sufficient evidence—quotations, facts, examples, argumentation—to support the main idea of the paragraph?
- Have I explained how the evidence supports the paragraph's main point, or have I left the reader to try to determine that on their own?
- Does the paragraph end with a sentence which ties the supporting details together, and relates them to the main idea?
- Are my sentences varied in length and construction, and have I used synonyms so as to avoid repetitious language?
- When I read the paragraph out loud, does it flow smoothly?

Sentences: Ask these questions about each sentence.

- Which sentences do I like the most? the least?
- Can my reader "see" what I'm saying?
- What words could I substitute for abstractions like "people," "thing," "aspect?"
- Are there extra words in this sentence?
- Can I combine this sentence with another one?
- Can I add adjectives and adverbs or find a more lively verb?

Citation and Documentation

- Have you used paraphrased or quoted material from another source?
- If so, have you cited the material correctly following the required or recommended documentation style for the paper?

Final Checklist

- Did I check spelling and punctuation?
- What words do I usually misspell?
- What punctuation problems have I had in previous papers?
- How does my paper end?
- Did I keep the promises I made to my reader at the beginning of the paper?
- When I read the assignment again, do I find anything I missed?
- What do I like best about this paper?
- What do I need to work on in my next paper?