

Revision Tips

Revision and editing are two very important stages in the writing process. Leaving enough time for both can improve your writing and make it clearer and more effective. It's best to have other people help you with these steps, but you can also do a lot of it on your own. Keep in mind 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, it is helpful to ignore most grammar and usage mistakes. Since you will be making major changes to your writing, it will be a waste of your time to correct them before revision. Also, be willing to admit when a section needs to be rewritten. Rather than agonize over how to keep what you have, it should save time to just rewrite.

Content

- Reread the directions. Did you follow them? If not, what needs to be fixed?
- Do you have a clear thesis? Does it reflect the paper? If not, how can it be fixed?
- Read each paragraph and identify the major claim. Is there adequate evidence in the form of facts, logic, or other data? Has the evidence been explained and interpreted for the reader? See chapter 4 in *The Little, Brown Handbook* for more help.
 - ❖ Activity:
 - Using four highlighters, highlight all direct quotes, paraphrases, summaries, and parenthetical citations, each with a different color.
 - Now look back at the paper. How much text is left uncolored? If there is a lot of white (these are your own words, ideas, and explanations), then you may have too little evidence. If there is very little white, then there are not enough of your thoughts in the paper.
 - Look at the number of times you use direct quotes. (Remember that direct quotes should only be used if the original says something in a very unique way). If there are too many quotes, you should change some of them to paraphrases or summaries.
 - Look at each direct quote, summary, and paraphrase—they should all have a parenthetical citation. If not, add it.

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 word(s) 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 of it in the margin of the paper.
 - 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 you feel that your paper is extremely unorganized, use several different highlighters to color each main idea; then, reorganize by color. Sometimes getting out scissors and tape also works.

- Transitions: These connect the ideas in your paper, inside and between paragraphs, so that the reader can follow it better (first, second, then, next, also, however, in addition, etc.). Underline all of your transitions and decide if they need improvement. See p. 86 in *The Little, Brown Handbook* for more ideas.
- Read your introduction and conclusion. Do they reflect your paper? Are they interesting and effective? See p. 103 *The Little, Brown Handbook* for help.

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 your paper communicates (angry, sarcastic, mad, professional, etc.). Make sure your tone is appropriate for your audience.
- Fair language: Use politically correct terms in relation to groups, ethnicities, gender, 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 certain word or phrase is used repetitively. Reading out loud will help you spot this, and you can then use a thesaurus or the synonym function in MS Word to fix it (right click on a word and the program will give you some alternatives).
- Avoid clichés (overused phrases), slang, and unnecessary words; these can confuse readers and do not sound professional. See chapters 38 and 39 in *The Little, Brown Handbook* for more help.
 - ❖ Activity:
 - Read your paper out loud and listen for the items above.

Editing

During the editing stage, your aim is to correct your language (not content or organization). Editing should always be done after revision, because at that point you should not be making any more major changes to the draft. The most important thing to do during an edit is READ OUT LOUD! Your mouth and ears will catch the mistakes that your eyes miss. Similar to revision, be prepared to rewrite very awkward sentences instead of trying to fix them. You can also ask others to read over your paper to help you catch mistakes. See Parts 3 and 4 (pp. 231-382) in *The Little, Brown Handbook* for more help.

- ❖ Activity:
 - Starting with the last sentence of your conclusion and working toward the introduction, read one sentence at a time out loud. This will force you to focus on the language instead of the content.

Sentence Structure

- Run-ons: These are long sentences that need punctuation. If you cannot read a sentence out loud without taking a breath, it may be a run-on. You can 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 your sentence doesn't, it may need to be combined with another sentence or revised completely.

Spelling and Punctuation

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

Format

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