Success Center Tips for

Revising, Editing, and Proofreading

Writers seldom compose a perfect paper on the first try; instead, effective writing is a result of going back over our work in three stages: **revision, editing, and proofreading**. After writing a first draft, take a break before starting this process to ensure a clear mind when reviewing your work.

Revising Your Work

During revision, writers *rethink the content* of the paper to sharpen its focus or add new details to strengthen their message. Ask yourself the following questions while revising, and then use the revision tips below to help you improve the content of your paper.

- **The first and most important step of revising is to compare your essay to the assignment prompt.** Does your work meet all of the instructor's criteria? If not, you should work to meet those criteria *before* making any other revisions.

- Does the **introductory** paragraph engage the reader and compel him or her to continue reading? Rewrite the opening sentences of the paper to describe a brief scene or exciting story, or add a surprising statistic, an important announcement, or quote a conversation.

- Does the **thesis statement** (main idea) let the audience know what the paper is about? If it does not, either rewrite information that does not reflect the topic or main idea of the paper, or rewrite the thesis statement to reflect the argument of the paper.

- Is the thesis statement supported by **ample details and convincing research** in the body of the paper? Complete more research to expand ideas with more facts, quotations, statistics, or examples.

- Does the paper contain **well-developed ideas** to support your points? Are significant opposing points presented and answered logically? Generate more ideas by returning to an invention strategy such as freewriting or questioning, e.g., Why? How? So what?

- Does the paper have a **logical organization** that presents information to readers in a way that will make sense to them? Restructure paragraphs by adding stronger examples to replace broad statements, and move sentences or rearrange paragraphs to improve the order of ideas.

- Is **every paragraph focused on a single topic** and relevant to the paper as a whole, or are there misplaced ideas or ideas that do not fit? Are any paragraphs, points, or ideas being repeated? Try to eliminate excess repetition or ideas that do not support the main idea in the thesis statement.

- Can you improve **the flow of ideas**? Use transition words and phrases, e.g., "however", "therefore", "in addition", or "for example".

- Are the **voice and tone** of the paper appropriate and consistent throughout? Eliminate informal language.

- Does the paper contain a clear, well-developed **conclusion?** Instead of repeating previous sentences word-for-word, summarize and synthesize your main points. Conclude with a call to action or an assessment of future implications.

- What improvements can be made in the **paper as a whole**? Keep the essay's purpose in mind, and be sure to check that the entire essay is relevant and on topic throughout.

Editing Your Paper

Now that you have revised for more significant concerns, you will want to make sentence-level edits in order to *clarify ideas and improve cohesion*. Use the following strategies to help you edit your work:

- Reading your work aloud is one of the most effective editing techniques. It helps catch errors by forcing you to slow down and look at every word, and also helps you to "hear" whether your sentences are grammatically correct.
  - ➤ *If you're not sure what to look for as you read, consider whether there are any sentences that caused you to stop to figure out their meaning – this is a clue that some editing is probably necessary.*

- Get feedback by having someone else (a classmate, friend, or tutor in the Success Center) read your work aloud too. Did it make sense to them? Were there places where they paused to re-read?

- If your assignment prompt specifies word or page counts, edit your work to avoid going too far under or over the requirements.

- Make sure your paper's title fits its content well and alerts the reader to what will be discussed.

- Look for grammatical issues that impede a sentence's meaning, such as sentence fragments, run-ons, comma splices, incorrect verb tense, subject/verb agreement problems, unclear pronouns, and over-used passive voice. *If you are not sure how to find these errors, ask a tutor!*

- Fix sentences that may be too vague by revising so that they get to the point.

- Use clear wording. Look for phrases that could use stronger wording or possibly be omitted.

- Use transitional phrases like "moreover" or "in addition" to indicate the connections between ideas, rather than using signposts such as "my next point is."

- Eliminate phrases such as "I think" or "I feel" to make your claims stronger and more effective.

- Consider using synonyms to replace any needlessly repeated words.

- Eliminate unnecessary words, sentences, phrases, or clauses.

- Vary the words that begin each sentence. A good rule of thumb is to revise your word choices if 3 or more consecutive sentences start with the same word.

- Watch out for unnecessary introductory phrases, such as "like I said before."

- Avoid using stock phrases like "due to the fact," "at this point in time," "in today's world," or "nowadays." State things in your own way instead.

- Break up lengthy sentences to help keep the meaning clear.

- Cut out excess adverbs. Use a descriptive verb that fits the action more appropriately instead.

- Eliminate meaningless or vague modifiers, such as "very," "really," "lots of," or "way more."

- Unless given permission from an instructor, avoid using "you," "we," or "I" in formal academic writing. Substitute it with a different pronoun ("one"), a more specific noun ("Americans") or reword the sentence.

- Avoid informal words and phrases, such as "good," "stuff," "things," or "cool." Academic writing almost always requires a formal tone.

- Use complete words instead of contractions, such as "it is" instead of "it's" – not only is this more formal, but it also helps you avoid misusing a contraction that does not mean what you think it means.

- When writing about a person or group of people, do not refer to them using "that" – use "who" instead.

- When describing periods of time, use specific language instead of vague terms. For example, you could say "since 2005" instead of "currently," or "during the middle ages" instead of "in ancient times."

- If you choose to use a grammar check program, remember that they are not fully reliable and that it is your responsibility as a student to double check any corrections.

Proofreading Your Paper

After making content revisions and sentence-level edits, the final step is to proofread your paper before submitting a final copy to an instructor. Proofreading will help you *find and correct minor errors*. Use the following strategies and checklist to help you proofread your work.

➢ Reading on an electronic device can cause your eyes to skim over errors – print your work out instead. Remember to double space to allow room to make notes.

➢ Read your paper from bottom to top to focus on each sentence individually. This strategy helps you discover mistakes you may have previously overlooked by concentrating on specific words and phrases.

➢ To improve focus on the lines being reviewed, cover the ones above and below it.

Checklist of Common Errors to Look for When Proofreading:

Capitalize:

☐ Proper nouns, which are the specific names for an individual person, place, or organization

☐ The first word in a poetic line

☐ The first word of a complete sentences inside parentheses

☐ The first word in a quotation (unless an ellipse has been used to indicate that words have been removed from the original text)

☐ In MLA Style: all words in the titles of works, except articles (the, a, an), prepositions (of, for), and conjunctions (and, but)

☐ In APA Style: only the first word of a title and any proper nouns it contains

Hyphenate:

☐ Numbers written in words

☐ Prefixes and suffixes

☐ Compound adjectives (well-known)

Use Italics:

☐ Titles of long works (books, movies, plays, television series, etc.)

☐ Words in a foreign language (unless widely used, such as résumé), or words you define in your paper

Use Quotation Marks:

☐ Titles of short works (short stories, articles, television episodes, etc.)

Use Abbreviations and Acronyms:

☐ Abbreviate titles (such as Dr. or Mr.)

☐ Spell out the proper name of an organization (Federal Bureau of Investigation), then use acronyms for any subsequent references (FBI)

Use Numbers:

☐ Spell out numbers above twenty; use numerals for numbers smaller than twenty

☐ Use numerals for addresses, dates, time of day (except with "o'clock")

Check the spelling of homophones (words that sound alike, but are spelled differently):

☐ There (means "that location") / their (the possessive form of "they") / they're (contraction of "they are")

☐ Its (the possessive form of "it") / it's (contraction of "it is")

Sources: Palmquist, Mike. *The Bedford Researcher*. Colorado State University. 2015.

Raimes, Ann, and Susan K. Miller-Cochran. *Keys For Writers*. 7th ed., Cengage Learning. 2014.

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