

Revising Your Draft

Created by: Brandon Everett

What does it mean to revise?

Revision literally means to “see again,” to look at something from a fresh, critical perspective. It is the continuing process of reassessing your arguments, reviewing your evidence, refining your purpose, and reorganizing your presentation. Some writers often consider addressing punctuation and spelling as the revision process, but that’s actually *proofreading*. It’s an important step before turning in your paper, but if your ideas are too general, your thesis is weak, and your organization is a mess, then proofreading will do little to improve the whole. Proofread AFTER you revise.

Why is revision important?

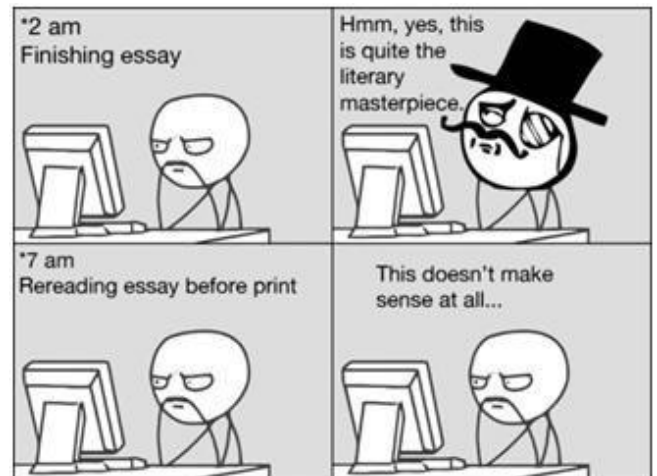
Writing is a process of discovery, and you don’t always produce your best work when you first get started. Revision is a chance for you to look critically at what you have written to see:

- if it’s really worth saying,
- if it conveys what you wanted to say or what you were asked to address in your prompt, and
- if a reader will understand what you’ve written.

What steps should I use when I begin to revise?

Here are a few things you can do when starting the revision process. But don’t try them all at one time. Instead, focus on two or three main areas during each revision session:

- **Manage your time.** Wait awhile after you’ve finished a draft before looking at it again, maybe a day or at least a few hours. When you return to the draft, be honest with yourself and ask yourself what you really think about the paper. **This obviously won’t work if you wait until the last minute to start your paper, so managing your time really begins when you first receive the assignment. Doing this will give yourself the best chance for success.*
- **Focus on the larger, global issues** in the paper (theme, content, etc.), not the local issues (grammar, punctuation, etc.).
- **Check the focus of the paper:** *Is it appropriate to the assignment? Is the topic too broad or too narrow? Do you stay on track through the entire paper?*
- **Think honestly about your thesis:** *Do you still agree with it? Should it be modified in light of something you discovered as you wrote the paper? Is your thesis too generalized, or does it take a specific position? Should it be changed altogether?*
- **Think about your purpose in writing:** *Does your introduction state clearly what you intend to do? Will your aims be clear to your readers?*



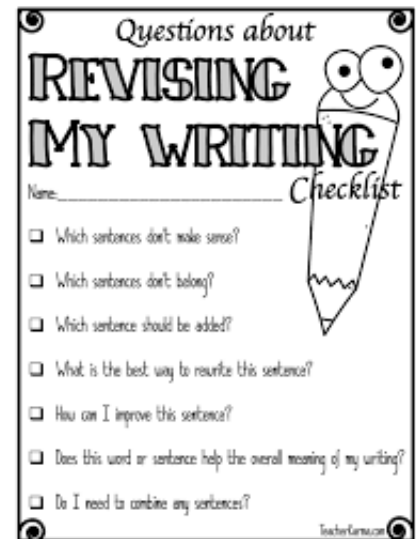
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What are some other steps I should consider in later stages of the revision process?

Revision isn't a one-and-done ordeal. It's a process. Once you've gone through your paper once and addressed certain issues that you noticed, a second (or third, if you've got the time) pass would be extremely helpful. Here are a few additional things to consider during the later stages of the revision process:

- **Examine the balance within your paper:** *Are some paragraphs more developed than others? Do you spend too much time on one trivial point and neglect a more important point? Do you give lots of detail early on and then let your points get thinner by the end?*
- **Connectivity:** *Does your paper follow through on what the thesis promises? Do you support all the claims in your thesis? Are the tone and formality of the language appropriate for your audience?*
- **Check the organization:** *Does your paper makes sense? Do the transitions move your readers smoothly from one point to the next? Do the topic sentences of each paragraph appropriately introduce what that paragraph is about? Would your paper work better if you moved some things around?*
- **Check your information:** *Are all your facts accurate? Are any of your statements misleading? Have you provided enough detail to satisfactorily support your points?*
- **Check your conclusion:** *Does your concluding paragraph tie the paper together efficiently and end on a stimulating note, or does it lack substantial development?*



How do I actually go about the process of revising?

When it comes to the actual revision of your paper, there are many ways you can go about it. Keep in mind that every writer is different, and what works best for some might not work best for others.

Here are a few tips that might help:

- ❖ **Try working from a printed copy;** it saves on the strain to your eyes from staring at a computer screen all day. Also, problems that seem invisible on the screen somehow tend to show up better on paper.
- ❖ **Read the paper out loud.** Hearing your writing can be extremely helpful in addressing flow and clarity. You can also have a friend or family member read to you. Take note when they stumble or pause; that might be a point to improve clarity.
- ❖ **Remember all those questions listed earlier?** Don't try to tackle all of them in one draft. Pick a few for each draft so that you won't go mad trying to see, all at once, if you've done everything.
- ❖ **Ask lots of questions and don't flinch from answering them truthfully.** For example, ask if there are opposing viewpoints that you haven't considered yet.

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But I don't want to rewrite my whole paper!

Fear not! Revision doesn't *necessarily* mean rewriting the whole paper. Maybe all you have to do is revise the thesis to match what you've discovered while writing; or perhaps come up with stronger arguments to defend your position or more vivid examples to illustrate your points. Sometimes it means shifting the order of your paper to help the reader follow your argument, or to change the emphasis of your points. Other times you may only need to add or delete material for balance or emphasis.

But sometimes I revise as I go, so wouldn't that work?



That's OK. The writing process is different for every writer. Sometimes you write something and then tinker with it before moving on. But be warned: there are two potential problems with revising as you go. One is that **if you revise only as you go along, you never get to think of the big picture.** The key is still to give yourself enough time to look at the essay as a whole once you've finished. Another danger to revising as you go is that **you may dampen your creativity.** If you spend too much time tinkering with what is on the page, you may lose some of what hasn't yet made it to the page.

Here's a tip: Don't proofread as you go. You may waste time correcting the commas in a sentence that ends up being cut anyway.

How do I get really good at revising?

The same way you get really good at anything—***do it often.*** Take revision seriously, be disciplined, and set high standards for yourself. Here are three more tips:

- ✓ **The more you produce, the more you can cut,** so don't limit yourself on length right away. Sometimes a word count can limit creativity. Explore your arguments as best you can, then revise and edit to fit the assignment criteria. It's always easier to edit from too much than to have too little and strain to fill space.
- ✓ **Think like a reader.** The more you can imagine yourself as a reader looking at your paper for the first time, the easier it will be to spot potential problems.
- ✓ **Hold yourself accountable.** The more you demand of yourself in terms of clarity and specificity, the clearer and more specific your writing will be.

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Reference:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/the_writing_process/proofreading/steps_for_revising.html



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