



## STRATEGIES FOR REVISING

### 1. What's the difference between revising and editing?

REVISION	EDITING
<p><b>Look for problems with:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting requirements of the prompt</li> <li>• Organization</li> <li>• Thesis</li> <li>• Paragraphing               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Topic sentences</li> <li>- Development and support of ideas</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Look for problems with:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentence clarity</li> <li>• Grammar</li> <li>• Punctuation</li> <li>• Spelling</li> <li>• Citation</li> </ul>

Simply put, **revising** is “the act of making changes to a written document to make it better” (Haar 10). It is the often messy work of rethinking, reorganizing, and rewriting pieces of your draft so that it becomes a better piece of writing in the eyes of your readers (and, hopefully, yours, too).

It may be helpful to conceptualize revision as a stage that happens after composing a first draft, and editing as a later stage, part of polishing a finished product. However, this linear model of writing may be insufficient, if we take into consideration all the ways that writers make changes to their writing throughout the entire writing process (Sommers 77).

## 2. Revising means more work...why should I do it?

As Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and experienced writing instructor Donald Murray puts it, “revision is not just clarifying meaning, it is discovering meaning and clarifying it while it is being discovered” (33). This means that **revision is a creative process**, in which you gain a better sense of what it is you actually want to communicate, while, at the same time, making changes to better match that intention.

Experienced writers tend to think about **revision as a recursive process** that they use to bring repeated attention to needs of the whole text—what ideas do they want to communicate and what form is best for the development of the argument? (Sommers 84)

## 3. What questions should I ask myself while I revise?

Think in terms of your audience. What expectations do they have that you need to meet? What do you want them to learn or think about after reading your paper?

To help you assess different parts of your essay you can ask yourself the following:

- *What big idea(s) do I want my reader to take away from my paper?* Your answer to this question should be expressed in your **thesis statement**.
- *After reading this paragraph, what do I want my reader to understand?* Your answer to this question should be expressed in the **topic sentence** of the paragraph (likely the first or second sentence).
- *Is each **paragraph** unified around **one central idea**?* Remember, one paragraph = one idea.
- *Is the **paragraph** too long (more than a page) or too short (only a sentence or two)?* Insert a paragraph break where your ideas shift. Combine shorter paragraphs together or develop them into their own fully fleshed out paragraph.
- *Is every idea supported with relevant evidence?* The answer to this question will help you determine if you have **fully developed each of your ideas**.

- Does your **conclusion** echo without exactly repeating the argument you presented in your **introduction**? Or has your argument changed by the time you got to the end of your draft? If the latter, evaluate which argument (the one you begin with or the one you end on) you want to focus on and revise accordingly.

These questions are excerpted and adapted from longer lists by Murray (36-39).

#### 4. What other strategies can I use to revise my papers?

**Ask for feedback:** There are many different ways that you can ask for feedback and get feedback from different readers.

- Go to your professor's office hours and ask them for comments on a draft (this is more respectful of a professor's time than emailing them with a paper and asking for feedback).
- Talk with a friend about your piece of writing, and bring up the questions that you have. Ask them to read your paper and narrate in the margin their experience of reading, so that you gain an idea of what ideas resonated and where/if they got lost or had questions (Gottschalk and Hjortshoj 70).
- Visit the Writing Center to talk with a peer tutor about your paper and gain another reader's perspective.

**Write a memory draft:** To help you generate more material and understand your own paper better, write a draft of it from memory. First, reread your paper carefully. Then rewrite your paper without consulting the original draft. Make your memory draft as long as or longer than the original. Evaluate your memory draft to see what material you could cycle into your prior draft (Bishop, "Revising," 16).

**Reverse outline:** Instead of using an outline to help you plan (which is still a good idea!), use an outline to help you revise. Print out a draft of your paper and number each paragraph. Then on a separate sheet of paper, list your paragraphs and summarize the main points and evidence in each one. Use this skeleton outline to evaluate your paper: are all parts of your thesis fully developed? Is there evidence for each main point? Does the order of information make sense? Do you address nay-sayers and counterarguments?

**Experiment with Titles:** Draft three substantially different titles for your essay. In separate documents, write a new introduction and conclusion to fit each title. Select the one you like best, and revise the rest of your draft so as to better incorporate the theme/idea/image that is introduced by your title (Bishop, "Revising," 22-23).

**Switch it up:** Try switching around your introduction and conclusion. What can you learn from that change? What surprises you? Could the change work more effectively than the original order? (Horning 48)

**Cool off:** If you have given yourself enough time, don't be afraid to let the draft sit for a while before coming back to it. Fresh eyes can often bring fresh perspective (Horning 49).

## Works Cited

- Bishop, Wendy. "Revising Out and Revising In." *Acts of Revision: A Guide for Writers*, edited by Wendy Bishop, Boynton/Cook, 2004, pp. 13-27.
- Gottschalk, Katherine and Keith Hjortshoj. *The Elements of Teaching Writing: A Resource for Instructors in All Disciplines*. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.
- Haar, Catherine. "Definitions and Distinctions." *Revision: History, Theory, and Practice*, edited by Alice Horning and Anne Becker, Parlor Press and the WAC Clearinghouse, 2006, pp. 10-24.
- Horning, Alice. "Revising Research Writing: A Theory and Some Exercises." *Acts of Revision: A Guide for Writers*, edited by Wendy Bishop, Boynton/Cook, 2004, pp. 38-50.
- Sommers, Nancy. "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers." *Landmark Essays on Writing Process*, edited by Sandra Perl, Hemogoras Press, 1994, pp. 75-84.
- Murray, Donald M. "Making Meaning Clear: The Logic of Revision." *The Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 3, no. 3, Fall/Winter 1981, pp. 33-40.