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

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.

During revision, writers *rethink the concept* of the paper to sharpen its focus or add new details to strengthen their message. Ask yourself the following questions:
- Does the **introductory** paragraph engage the reader and compel him or her to continue reading?
- Does the **thesis statement** (main idea) let the audience know what the paper is about?
- Does the paper contain **well-developed ideas** to support your points?
- Is **every paragraph focused on a single topic**?
- Can you improve **the flow of ideas**?
- Does the paper contain a clear, well-developed **conclusion**, which sums up the main points**?**
- What improvements can be made in the **paper as a whole**? Is it on topic throughout?

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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?
- 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.
- Watch out for unnecessary introductory phrases, such as "like I said before," "at this point in time," or "nowadays." State things in your own way instead.

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

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.
TWL Team. "25 Editing Tips for Tightening Your Copy." *The Write Life*, 7 Aug. 2013. https://thewritelife.com/edit-your-copy/. Accessed 10 May 2017.