

Revision

What is revision?

Revision is not merely proofreading or editing an essay. Proofreading involves making minor changes, such as putting a comma here, changing a word there, deleting part of a sentence, etc. Revision, on the other hand, involves making more substantial changes. Literally, it means re-seeing what you have written in order to re-examine (and possibly change and develop) what you have said or how you have said it. One might revise the argument, organization, style, or tone of one's paper.

Revision Strategies:

Memory Draft

Set aside what you've written and rewrite your essay from memory. Compare the draft of your paper to your memory draft. Does your original draft clearly reflect what you want to argue? Do you need to modify the thesis? Should you reorganize parts of your paper? This technique helps point out what you think you are doing in comparison to what you are actually doing in a piece of writing.

Reverse Outline

Some writers find it helpful to make an outline before writing. A reverse outline, which one makes after writing a draft, can help you determine whether your paper should be reorganized. To make a reverse outline and use it to revise your paper: Read through your paper, making notes in the margins about the main point of each paragraph. Create your reverse outline by writing those notes down on a separate piece of paper. Use your outline to do three things: 1. See whether each paragraph plays a role in supporting your thesis. 2. Look for unnecessary repetition of ideas. 3. Compare your reverse outline with your draft to see whether the sentences in each paragraph are related to the main point of that paragraph, per the reverse outline. This technique is helpful in reconsidering the organization and coherence of an essay. By figuring out what each paragraph contributes to your paper, you will be able to see where each fits best within it.

Anatomy of a Paragraph

Select different colored highlighters to represent the different elements that should be found in an argumentative essay. Make a key somewhere on the first page, noting what each color represents. You might consider attributing a color to thesis, argumentative topic sentence, evidence, analysis, and fluffy flimflam. Now, color code your essay. When you're finished, diagnose what you see, paying attention to where you've placed your topic sentences, whether you're using enough evidence, and whether you could expand or streamline your analysis. This strategy is helpful for visual learners and authors who feel overwhelmed by the length of their draft or scope of their revision project. It also helps to illustrate the organization and development of an argument.

Unpacking an Idea

Select a certain paragraph in your essay and try to explain in more detail how the concepts or ideas fit together. Unpack the evidence for your claims by showing how it supports your topic sentence, main idea, or thesis. This technique will help you more deliberately explain the steps in your reasoning and point out where any gaps may have occurred within it. It will help you establish how these reasons, in turn, lead to your conclusions.



Exploding a Moment

Select a certain paragraph or section from your essay and write new essays or paragraphs from that section. Through this technique, you might discover new ideas—or new connections between ideas—that you'll want to emphasize in your paper or in a new paper in the future.

3x5 Note Card

Describe each paragraph of your draft on a separate note card. On one side of the note card, write the topic sentence; on the other, list the evidence you use to back up your topic sentence. Next, evaluate how each paragraph fits into your thesis statement. This technique will help you look at a draft on the paragraph-level.

Writing between the Lines

Add information between sentences and paragraphs to clarify concepts and ideas that need further explanation. This technique helps the writer to be aware of complex concepts and to determine what needs additional explanation.

Cubing

This technique helps you look at your subject from six different points of view (imagine the 6 sides of a cube and you get the idea). Take the topic of your paper (or your thesis) and 1) describe it, 2) compare it, 3) associate it with something else you know, 4) analyze it (meaning break it into parts), 5) apply it to a situation with which you are familiar, 6) argue for or against it. Write at a paragraph, page, or more about each of the six points of view on your subject.

Talk Your Paper

Tell a friend what your paper is about. Pay attention to your explanation. Are all of the ideas you describe actually in the paper? Where did you start in explaining your ideas? Does your paper match your description? Can the listener easily find all of the ideas you mention in your description? This technique helps match up verbal explanations to written explanations. Which presents your ideas most clearly, accurately, and effectively?

Ask Someone to Read Your Paper Out Loud to You

Ask a friend to read your draft out loud to you. What do you hear? Where does your reader stumble, sound confused, or have questions? Did your reader ever get lost in your text? Did your ideas flow in a logical order and progress from paragraph to paragraph? Did the reader need more information at any point? This technique helps a writer gain perspective on an essay by hearing first-hand the reaction of a fellow student to it.

Ask Someone without Knowledge of the Course to Read Your Paper

You can tell if your draft works by sharing it with someone unfamiliar with the context. If she can follow your ideas, your professor will be able to as well. This technique will help you test out the clarity of your paper on those not acquainted with the course material.

Return to the Prompt

This technique may seem obvious, but once you've gotten going on an assignment, you may get carried away from what the instructions have asked you to do. Double check the prompt. Have you answered all of the questions (or parts of questions) thoroughly? Is there any part you may have neglected or missed? This technique will help you keep in mind what the questions are asking and to determine whether you have addressed all of their components effectively.