

Revision



What is revision?

Now that you've written your paper, it's time to revise it. Many people think that revision just means reading over your paper and changing a few commas or catching typos, but revision is much bigger than that: it's a way of looking at the "big picture" of your paper and determining how to give it a stronger framework, a more coherent argument, or to reorganize the structure of your paper so it flows better.

What are some useful approaches to revising a project?

Review your instructor's feedback

If you have feedback from an instructor, take a look at his or her comments and make sure you understand them. Next, consider separating comments into at least two categories: suggestions for editing and suggestions for revision. Editing deals more with grammar, punctuation, and style whereas revision deals more with larger issues tied to organization, content, and argument.

Give yourself some time

When you write for a long time, you get into a mode of, "Oh man, I have so many ideas! I've got to get them all down!" Sometimes, when you're chasing after a word count or a page limit, ideas can get muddled, but you're so caught up in writing that you don't quite realize it. Give yourself a little space before you come back to a draft, so you can look at it with fresh eyes. It also helps to revise using a hard copy of your work rather than looking at the computer—sometimes, things stick out more on paper than they do on-screen.

Revision

Pick one or two things to look for per read-over

If you decide that you want to focus on organization, sentence structure, paragraph length, citation style, AND the strength of your thesis all in one read-over, it's going to become an overwhelming task. By focusing on one or two things each time—for example, starting with an examination of your thesis and the evidence supporting it, followed by another read-through regarding organization, and then finally one more for typos and awkward phrasing—then you are more likely to be successful.

Read the paper aloud

If you come to the Writing Center often, you know that it's our go-to method for examining papers. Reading aloud will not only help catch smaller errors, such as typos or awkward phrasing, but will also help you see the flow of your ideas from one section to another. You can also see if a friend will read your paper aloud to you; sometimes, hearing the paper read by somebody else will clarify whether some sections work or not.

Do a reverse outline

If you're struggling with the organization of your paper, try using a reverse outline to examine how you've written your ideas. On a separate piece of paper, list the topic sentence or main point of each paragraph. By the time you finish, you'll have a skeleton of your paper, and it will be much easier to see how the ideas fit together—or when they don't. For example, if you're doing a paper on Napoleon and you go from discussing his military techniques in one paragraph to his childhood memories in the next, you can find a way to reorganize those ideas so they fit together much more smoothly. If you want to play around with the organization of your paper even more, write down your topic sentences on notecards (one per card). Then try moving them around to see how you could re-organize your paper!

Revision

Re-consider your thesis

When you're writing, ideas can and will change radically, and that's fine. However, it might help to go through your paper again and look at how each paragraph contributes to your thesis. If you started off arguing about the importance of computers in society and your paper ended up being more about mobile technology, you may need to re-tool your thesis in order to make it match with the rest of your paper.

Think about your audience

As you read over your paper again, think about how it might appear to an outside reader. Do you have terms that you are more familiar with, but might need defining for those that have never heard them? Do you over-explain points that your professor is already aware of? Do you need to use more formal or professional language? Thinking about who will read over this paper—a professor, a scholarship committee, a mentor, a supervisor, your best friend—can help you think about the way that you write.

Check your intro and conclusion

Does your introduction introduce all your points that you discuss, or do some of your ideas pop out from nowhere? Does it hook the reader and engage them in your topic? Likewise, does your conclusion just repeat what you've already said throughout the paper, or does it provide a satisfying ending to your paper? While the body of your paper is important, don't forget that the intro and conclusion are equally as important, and sometimes get overlooked. You don't want to leave your thesis out of your intro, and you don't want to start talking about totally new ideas in your conclusion. Spend some time with those paragraphs in particular.