



Strategies for Essay Revision

Revision is a vital part of the writing process. Many people revise sections of their essay as they write, but revising a complete draft is particularly useful because it gives you, the author, a chance to step back and look at your essay as a whole. With a finished draft, it is clearer whether or not the thesis is successful or the organization is logical. Make these *big* considerations your priority when revising.

When revising your own paper, or helping a classmate, there is an order of concern you should follow. You will use your time revising more efficiently if you focus on higher order concerns (like your thesis statement) before focusing on sentence-level concerns (such as grammar).

First Order of Concern

► **Thesis:**

The thesis is your main point. It is what the paper is all about. You must make sure the thesis is present and clear. Is your thesis specific enough for the scope of your essay? Does your paper focus on supporting your thesis or does it wander?

► **Introduction vs. Conclusion:**

Read your introduction and conclusion without looking at the rest of the paper. Do they match? Sometimes authors start with one thesis and end up with another. Make sure ideas in your introduction and conclusion are consistent. Otherwise, your essay's argument will not be consistent and your readers will be confused.

► **Organization:**

Do you present ideas in a logical and clear manner? Are your main points connected and do they have a clear connection to your thesis? Check to see if ideas seem disconnected or if evidence falls under the wrong topic sentence. The better your organization, the more your reader will understand your essay's content.

► **Audience:**

Who is your audience? Is your essay appropriate for them? Your audience determines the tone and purpose of your essay. Take time to consider who your audience is and how they will read your essay.

Second Order of Concern

► **Topic Sentences:**

Does each paragraph have a topic sentence clearly stating that paragraph's main idea? If paragraphs do not have a central point, or if the central point is not stated in a topic sentence,

your audience will not understand the purpose of the information they are reading. If the topic sentences are present, is their relationship to your thesis clear?

► **Support/Evidence:**

Does each paragraph have evidence or proof supporting the topic sentence? If a paragraph has a focus but no evidence, then the point is not support—it's just opinion. Be sure to support each idea in your essay with specific details.

► **Documentation:**

Is all your (borrowed) evidence documented? It is plagiarism if you use quotes, paraphrasing, or other evidence without citations. Make sure all of your (borrowed) evidence is correctly cited using a standard citation style.

► **Clarity:**

Will your essay be clear to your audience? Are all your ideas and terms clear and well defined? Remember, writing is a form of communication limited to what is on the page. Your readers cannot ask questions if they do not understand. Take time to explain each point. Ensure that your reader can understand exactly what you mean.

► **Voice:**

How would you describe your narrative voice? How you phrase your essay influences how your audience will respond to what they read. Keep your readers' attention by avoiding passive voice, jargon, and wordiness.

Third Order of Concern

► **Grammar, Punctuation, Spelling:**

Although mechanics such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling are at the bottom of the list of concerns, they are very necessary. If an essay has great ideas but cannot be understood by readers because of grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors, then the essay has failed. Be sure to pay close attention to these details in the drafts of your essay.

► **Proofreading for Typos and Document Design:**

Even the best typists may occasionally press the wrong key when typing quickly, so be sure to look over your essay one last time for typographical errors. This is also a good time to check your Document Design (font, spacing, margins, Header(s), Heading(s), essay title, etc.).

The original document was created by the Evergreen Writing Center (<http://www.evergreen.edu/writingcenter/handouts/general/revision.pdf>). It has been modified to meet the needs of HCC's Learning Support Center.