Revising, Editing, and Proofreading

Revising your writing means to "re-see" your writing, to look at it in a new way and to find ways to make your writing more effective. When you revise, you are more concerned with the global issues (sometimes called "higher order concerns") of your writing, meaning such elements as thesis, organization, and development.

You might want to follow these guidelines to begin revising your paper:

**Thesis or Focus:**
1. Does the paper have a central thesis?
2. Can you, if asked, offer a one-sentence explanation or summary of what the paper is about?
3. Ask someone to read the first paragraph or two and tell you what he or she thinks the paper will discuss.

**Audience and Purpose:**
1. Are you writing to an appropriate audience? Do you know who your audience should be for this paper?
2. Do you have a clear purpose for your essay? What is your paper supposed to do or accomplish?
3. Does the purpose of your paper match the assignment?

**Organization and Coherence:**
1. Does the paper progress in an organized, logical way?
2. Go through the paper and jot down notes on the topics of the various paragraphs. Look at this list and see if you can think of a better organization.
3. Ask someone to read the paper. At the end of each paragraph, ask the person to forecast where the paper is headed. If the paper goes in a direction other than the one forecasted by the reader, is there a good reason, or do you need to rewrite something to make it more coherent?

**Development:**
1. Are there places in the paper where more details, examples, or specifics are needed?
2. Do any paragraphs seem much shorter and in need of more material than others?
3. Ask someone to read the paper and comment if something is unclear and needs more description, explanation, or support.

Examining local issues (sometimes called "lower order concerns"), such as sentence structure, punctuation, word choice, and spelling are also a part of revising, though this is actually **editing**.

1. Read the paper out loud and watch and listen for anything that sounds incorrect. (This works for many people, but not for all.)
2. As you read your paper, try to pretend that you are seeing it for the first time so that you are reading what is actually there, not what you think is there. It helps if you can walk away from the paper for several hours or even a day or two. You can then read it more objectively and with fresh eyes.
3. Note the errors you have made on previous assignments. Are there patterns? If so, look for the same types of errors in your current paper.
4. Check your paper for use of passive voice and change sentences to active voice.
5. Cut our wordiness wherever possible.
6. Use active verbs rather than “to be” verbs (such as “is,” “are,” etc.)
7. Avoid beginning sentences with “it is” or “there are” unless absolutely necessary. Replace those phrases with strong verbs.
8. Look for clichés and colloquialisms. Change them to more precise statements.
9. In places where your sentences may be short and choppy, try combining sentences by using either coordinating conjunctions or by making one of the sentences a dependent clause with a subordinating conjunction. The conjunctions will help you to show relationships between ideas.

Sentence Structure and Usage
10. To correct subject-verb agreement errors, find the main verb in each sentence and match the verb to its subject, making sure that the subject and verb agree in number.
11. To correct pronoun reference/agreement errors: skim your paper and stop at each pronoun and find the noun that it stands for or replaces. If you can’t find a noun, insert one where appropriate or change the pronoun to a noun. If you do find a noun, make sure the pronoun and noun agree in number and person.
12. To correct errors of parallelism: skim your paper again, looking at key words that signal parallel structures, especially: and, or, not only . . . but also, either . . . or, neither . . . nor, both . . . and. Make sure that the items connected by these words (adjectives, nouns, phrases, etc.) are in the same grammatical form.

Spelling and Punctuation
13. Examine each word in the paper individually. Move from the end of each line back to the beginning. Pointing with a pencil helps you to see each word.
14. Use the dictionary to check the spelling of most words, even words you believe are spelled correctly. Do not rely on the spell checking feature of your word processing program to catch all misspelled words.
15. To correctly punctuate compound sentences: skim your paper and locate coordinating conjunctions—and, but, for, nor, so, and yet—and note if there is a complete sentence on each side of the conjunction. If so, be sure you insert a comma before the conjunction.
16. To correctly punctuate with introductory commas: skim your paper, looking only at the first two or three words of each sentence. Stop if one of these words is a subordinating conjunction, a transition words, a participle, or a preposition. Place a comma at the end of the introductory phrase or clause.
17. To correct comma splice errors: skim the paper, stopping at every comma. If there is a complete sentence on each side of the comma, add a coordinating conjunction or replace the comma with a semi-colon.
18. To correct sentence fragments: look at each sentence to see if it contains an independent clause. Look especially for sentences that begin with subordinating conjunctions. Make sure the sentence is not just a piece of the previous or following sentence that mistakenly got separated by a period.
19. To check for missing words: read the paper out loud, pointing to every word as you read. Don’t let your eye move ahead until you spot each word. This also helps you to see words you may have repeated.

This material is adapted from the Purdue University Online Writing Lab handout on revision and editing and from The Little, Brown Compact Handbook, 4th edition.
EDITING CHECKLIST FOR STYLE AND GRAMMAR

1. Clarity. Does every sentence communicate your meaning in a clear, direct style? Does your paper contain any of the following common causes of unclear sentences?
   - Wordiness
   - Missing words
   - Confusing shifts in verb tense
   - Faulty parallelism
   - Misplaced and dangling modifiers
   - Problems with coordination and subordination

2. Word choice. Is your choice of words as precise as possible? Have you avoided slang, clichés, and other inappropriate usages? Have you misused any commonly confused words (for example, advice vs. advise)?

3. Grammar conventions. Does your paper contain any of the common errors that may confuse or distract the reader?
   - Sentence fragments
   - Comma splices
   - Run-on sentences
   - Subject-verb agreement problems
   - Incorrect verb forms
   - Inconsistent verb tenses
   - Pronoun-antecedent agreement problems
   - Incorrect pronoun forms

4. Don’t forget to follow MLA or APA documentation styles correctly.

5. Check for correct spelling including titles.

6. Are all proper names capitalized? Have you capitalized titles of works correctly and either italicized them or put them in quotation marks as required?

7. Have you punctuated your sentences correctly?

8. Are sources cited correctly? Is the works cited or reference page in the correct format?

9. Have you checked direct quotes against the original for accuracy?

1. **Editing for clarity.** As you edit, concentrate on sentence style, aiming for clearly focused writing. You should condense and focus sentences that are wordy and lack a clear subject and vivid verb:

Draft:

Although both vertebral and wrist fractures cause deformity and impair movement, hip fractures, which are one of the most devastating consequences of osteoporosis, significantly increase the risk of death, since 12%-30% of patients with a hip fracture die within one year after the fracture, while the mortality rate climbs to 40% for the first two years post fracture.

Revised:

Hip fractures are one of the most devastating consequences of osteoporosis. Although vertebral and wrist fractures cause deformity and impair movement, hip fractures significantly increase the risk of death. Within one year after a hip fracture, 12%-20% of the injured die. The mortality rate climbs to 40% after two years.

2. **Eliminate expletive constructions.** Usually sentences beginning with *it is* or *there is/there are* — called expletive constructions — are weak and indirect. Using a clear subject and a vivid verb makes such sentences more powerful.

Draft:

There are stereotypes from the days of a divided Germany.

Revised:

Stereotypes formed in the days of a divided Germany persist.

3. **Editing for word choice.** As you review your draft, replace general terms with more specific words.

Draft:

Foreign investment in Germany will remain low because of several factors.

Revised:

Foreign investment in Germany will remain low because of increased labor costs, high taxation, and government regulation.

4. **Editing for complete sentences.**

Draft:

Photographs of immigrants pledging allegiance to the American flag at a naturalization ceremony, of emotional immigrants on the plane to their country, and of villagers fleeing rebel gangs.

Revised:

Photographs of immigrants pledging allegiance to the American flag at a naturalization ceremony, of emotional immigrants on the plane to their country, and of villagers fleeing rebel gangs exemplify the range of migration stories.
Understanding Your Writing Assignment: Before you can begin any writing assignment, you need to know exactly what you are being asked to do. The first step is understanding the terms your instructor has used. Some terms appear frequently in writing assignments, whether for research papers, lab reports, or essay exams.

Common Writing Assignment Terms

Using different terms, form an essay question likely to appear on a final exam in a course (work in groups)

Analyze. Separate a subject into parts and then discuss, examine, or interpret each part and explain how the parts contribute to the whole.

Compare. Examine two or more items or ideas and explain their similarities.

Contrast. Examine two or more items or ideas and describe their differences.

Classify. Place a subject into a category with similar items. Defend or explain how you arrived at that category and how one category differs from another.

Define. Provide the meaning of a term or concept by giving examples, synonyms, antonyms (opposites), etymology (word history), or dictionary definitions. Explain the limits of the definition.

Describe. Give the physical or non-physical qualities and characteristics of an object or idea.

Discuss. Present the pros and cons of an issue. This is sometimes used more broadly to include other terms on this list.

Evaluate. Give a reasoned opinion, usually in terms of the merit of a particular work, idea, or person.

Enumerate. Make a list of a topic’s component ideas, aspects, or parts.

Explain. Clarify something by explaining how it functions, how to do it, or what its causes and effects are.

Identify. Indicate or describe what a thing is, what it’s composed of, or when and where it occurs.

Interpret. Comment upon a subject or explain its meaning and significance, i.e., how or why it is important.

Illustrate. Give examples or a description, sometimes by offering a narrative or anecdote or providing a visual representation.

Outline. Give a historical overview, or describe a topic’s main ideas, parts, or structure.

Prove. Argue a position by supporting a claim with evidence.

Summarize. Give main points, highlights of a longer work, or a condensed account of an article, story, or event.

Trace. Give a historical overview or outline of change, or summarize a chronological/sequential order of events.

From the Texas A & M University Writing Center