

Revision Strategies and Checklist



More than a quick sweep for spelling errors, revising a paper may require rethinking, rewriting, and restructuring. This handout offers some practical strategies and a checklist of questions to help you revise your work.

Revision Strategies

While writers approach revision in many different ways, consider the following common strategies:

- **Give yourself time to revise.** Plan revision and editing time into your writing plan and process, recognizing that it often takes more time to revise and edit than to write.
- **Shift from writer to reader.** Try to read your work, not as the author, but as a reader. Read your work several times, looking at specific areas each time (e.g., content, use of sources, structure, style, etc.). Some writers even read their work backwards, sentence by sentence, so that they can concentrate on the mechanics of the writing instead of the meaning.
- **Work from a hard copy.** Printing out your work will allow you to see your work differently than you do on the screen. Do a close reading of your work with a pencil in hand to mark changes.
- **Ask for feedback** from a Writing Center tutor, instructor, TA, and/or skilled friend or family member. This process can help you reflect on your writing and learn how other people read it.
- **Read your work aloud** to hear if your writing sounds the way you want it to. This exercise can also help you catch small errors that your eye would otherwise overlook.
- **Review previous comments about your work** (feedback on other assignments or drafts), and make sure you have addressed these areas of concern in your current work.
- **Set your work aside** for enough time that you can come back to it with fresh eyes. Give yourself at least 24 hours between the time you finish your draft and the time you begin revision. You may even need more time than that, depending on the length and depth of your work.
- **Create a reverse outline** of your work by underlining your thesis statement and all of your topic sentences and writing them out in order. Reviewing this outline of your work will give you a stronger sense of your structure and organization of ideas and help you determine whether you want to delete, move, or further develop any material.
- **Address the big picture before focusing on sentence-level errors.** To make best use of your time and efforts, look at appropriateness, content, and structure before addressing issues of style or mechanics. This will keep you from spending time editing portions of your work that you may later delete or rewrite. **The revision checklist provided will help you address concerns in an effective order.**

Revision Checklist

Address the following questions as you revise your work, keeping in mind that not all questions may be applicable to your assignment. Answering these questions in the order they are listed will also help you prioritize your work and make best use of your efforts.

Appropriateness

- Have you reviewed the assignment requirements and supporting materials (examples, notes, instructor or TA feedback, grading scale or rubric) to ensure your work fulfills all requirements?
- Does the writing match the assignment or the conventions of the genre/type of writing? (e.g. research paper, lab report, lit review, etc.)
- Is the work appropriate for its intended audience? (tone, content, development, format)

Content

- Is your content focused, well-reasoned, supported, and developed?
- If sources are used, are they introduced, incorporated well, and properly cited? Do they show evidence of thorough research?
- Have you adequately addressed the topic, including contextualizing the work and considering alternative viewpoints or approaches?
- Are there holes in your logic or places where more evidence or analysis is needed?

Organization

- Does your writing progress in a logical and ordered way?
- Does your introduction engage the reader, set the tone for your work, establish context, and lead to the main idea or thesis?
- If you have a thesis statement, does it establish the purpose and scope of the writing through a specific arguable claim and indicate the organization of the work?
- Are your body paragraphs clearly focused on a main idea or point? Do they connect to the main point or thesis and move the writing forward to the conclusion? Is evidence followed by analysis?
- Are headings, topic sentences, and transitions used effectively?
- Does your conclusion explain the implications of the work, remind readers of the main points, and provide a sense of closure?

Format

- Is the document set up in the correct format? (margins, font, spacing, headers, page numbers, etc.)
- If a specific formatting style is being used (e.g., APA, Chicago, MLA) is it being used consistently and correctly?

Polishing

- Have you reviewed and revised the work, run spellcheck, and made a clear effort to address previous feedback?
- Are there errors that alter the meaning of the text or make the writing unclear?
- Are there patterns of errors? (e.g., punctuation that is often misused, repeated verb tense errors, multiple sentence fragments, etc.) If so, try to identify and address these errors throughout your work.
- Is your sentence style clear, engaging, and appropriate?