



Seminary Hacks

REVISING, REVISING, REVISING!

OVERVIEW

Real writing begins not with the first draft of a text, but rather with the successive revisions and rewrites of that draft, each of which clarifies and refines the argument and message. The full set of processes and actions utilized in revision are what creates real writing that is lasting and memorable.

First, as you contemplate revision, it's important to make the distinction among the following terms:

proofreading: the careful reading of text for grammar, spelling, and mechanics

editing: the process whereby the writer considers word choice, sentence variety, text length, and precision

revision: the process of 'reseeing' the work in its entirety paying close attention to the thesis statement, argumentation, logic, evidence, conclusion, and impact



OVERVIEW

Each of these elements is important to the success of the text, but the central and most important of the three is the process of revision. Successful writers such as E.B. White, Edith Wharton, Donald Murray, Mortimer Adler, and Nancy Sommers proclaim revision as the bedrock of effective writing. Each revision focuses and refines the message and the impact of the text. It's crucial to allow for ample time to undertake revision. Of course, this means finishing a first draft at least a day before it is due, preferably two days.

Within the revision process, a writer achieves clarity, refined organization and effective messaging. To do this, a writer must step back from the paper and see it with an unbiased and fair reader's eye. This stance is not one of negatively judging/grading; rather, it is one of refining and polishing what is sound and effective and trimming what is unnecessary or repetitive.



TIPS FOR REVISING A TEXT

- * Allow the text to rest at least 24 hours. This will bring a fresh and rested perspective to what is actually there, and to that which needs to be sharpened, reworked, or given stronger evidence.
- * Suspend the raging negative voice and the vaunting prideful spirit and read as if you are an open-minded, curious, and demanding reader, **new to the topic**.
- * Read the text aloud from a printed copy. The eye sees differently and more accurately in actual print. Your ear will discern rough patches and all repetitions.
- * Zero in on the introductory paragraph and especially the thesis statement, making sure that it clearly states the issue and the intent of the paper. This statement should be clear and unequivocal.
- * Read assuming that all explanations and analyses will be apprehended and considered by the reader; no paraphrasing or re-explanations are necessary.



TIPS FOR REVISING A TEXT

- * First, look to make sure that there is ample and relevant **information** that is specific, accurate, and interesting. Not too much, and not too little
- * Second, look for **meaning** in the information. Each piece of information must carry the reader toward meaning.
- * Third, look for evidence of **audience** and its engagement. All information should be understood and useable by the audience for which it was intended. Critical questions and exceptions should be anticipated and addressed.
- * Fourth, look at **structure and logic** to make sure that they are appropriate for the subject. Check the argument to eliminate fallacies and to strengthen unity. Make sure that one point follows from the point before it. Check for effective transitions between paragraphs.
- * Fifth, check for **voice**, the force which drives a piece of writing forward. It must ‘sound’ like you in the most honest manner. Be as authentic and sincere as possible.



TIPS ON SENTENCE REVISION

Practical advice for ensuring that your sentences are alive:

- * Use forceful verbs—replace long verb phrases with a more specific verb. For example, replace “She argues for the importance of the idea” with “She defends the idea.”
- * Look for places where you’ve used the same word or phrase twice or more in consecutive sentences and look for alternative ways to say the same thing OR for ways to combine the two sentences.
- * Cut as many prepositional phrases as you can without losing your meaning. For instance, the following sentence, “There are several examples of the issue of integrity in Huck Finn,” would be much better this way, “Huck Finn repeatedly addresses the issue of integrity.”



TIPS ON SENTENCE REVISION

- * Check your sentence variety. If more than two sentences in a row start the same way (with a subject followed by a verb, for example), then try using a different sentence pattern.
- * Aim for precision in word choice. Don't settle for the best word you can think of at the moment—use a thesaurus (along with a dictionary) to search for the word that says exactly what you want to say.
- * Look for sentences that start with “It is” or “There are” and see if you can revise them to be more active and engaging.



CAVEATS

As in any intellectual endeavor, controlling the variety of voices in one's head is important. If you have received feedback, whether from a peer or from a trusted source, be mindful that it is just that – the opinion of an individual on first reading of a rough draft. The writer must be careful to test praise to make sure it is warranted, put negative criticism under the light of logic and accuracy, and weigh any suggestion in light of the text as a whole.

If you realize that you no longer agree with or support the thesis statement, by all means re-write it to 'fit' what you have developed and conveys that about which you have a strong opinion. The same advice applies to an element of the argument or development. However, under no circumstance should you 'hide' or disregard a point in direct conflict with your argument. Instead, report it and put it into the context of the argument in a full and fair manner. Not to do so leaves the entire paper's argument open to dismissal.



CAVEATS

Everyone recognizes and respects clarity and precision in writing. From our earliest experiences with written and oral communication, our ears and minds let the sound and meaning of words penetrate our hearts because they are the voice of reason and creativity. Essentially, they are the earliest, and for most, the central methods that produce meaning and by extension learning. The beauty of excellent writing is the fact that anyone and everyone values precision and lyricism and rhythm and image and sound and elegance. Revision, according to all the best and most respected writers, is the key process that creates excellence.



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