

Revision Strategies and Checklist



Revision means more than making 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:

- **Schedule 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.
- **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.
- **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 (e.g., content, use of sources, structure, style, etc.).
- **Address the big picture before focusing on sentence-level errors.** To make best use of your time and efforts, look at assignment appropriateness, content, and structure before addressing issues of style or mechanics. This will keep you from spending time editing portions of your work you may later delete or rewrite. **The revision checklist provided will help you address concerns in an effective order.**
- **Create a reverse outline** of your work by underlining your thesis statement (main idea) and all of your topic sentences (supporting ideas) 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.
- **Review previous feedback about your work.** Consider what others have said about what works well in your writing and what needs additional work. This may include feedback on other drafts or assignments. Make note of patterns in feedback and address 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 several hours or even several days between the time you finish a draft and the time you begin revision. You may need more time than that, depending on the length and depth of your work. As time allows, take additional breaks between steps of the revision process.
- **Read your work aloud** to hear if your writing sounds the way you want it to and to help you catch small errors your eye would otherwise overlook. Some writers even read their work in reverse, sentence by sentence, to isolate each line and concentrate on the mechanics of the writing instead of the meaning.
- **Ask for feedback** from a Writing Center consultant, instructor, TA, and/or skilled friend or family member. The process of talking about your writing with others will help you reflect on your writing and learn how other people read it.

Revision Checklist

Consider the following criteria as you revise your work, keeping in mind that some criteria may not be applicable to your specific writing task. Addressing the points in the order listed will also help you prioritize your work and make best use of your time and efforts. If you have difficulties during any stage of the revision process, know that additional resources are always available in the Writing Center.

Appropriateness

- The paper fulfills all the requirements of the prompt and supporting materials (e.g., examples, notes, instructor or TA feedback, grading scale or rubric).
- The writing assignment matches the conventions of the genre or type of writing (e.g., research paper, lab report, lit review, resume, etc.).
- The work is appropriate for its intended audience (e.g., tone, content, development, format).

Content

- The content is focused, well-reasoned, supported, and developed.
- Sources, if used, are accurate, credible, relevant, current (if applicable to your field of study), and show evidence of thorough research. Sources are introduced, incorporated, and cited properly.
- The paper contextualizes the topic and addresses it adequately, taking alternative viewpoints and approaches into consideration.
- There are no holes in logic or places where more evidence or analysis is needed.

Organization

- The writing progresses in a logical and ordered way.
- The introduction engages readers, establishes context, sets the tone for the rest of the work, and leads to the main idea or thesis.
- If there is a thesis statement, it establishes the purpose and scope of the writing through a specific arguable claim and indicates the organization of the work.
- Body paragraphs are clearly focused on a main idea or point; they connect to the main point or thesis and move the writing forward to the conclusion. Evidence is followed by analysis.
- Headings, topic sentences, and transitions are used effectively.
- The conclusion explains the implications of the work, reminds readers of the main points, and provides a sense of closure.

Format

- The document is set up in the correct format (margins, font, spacing, headers, page numbers, etc.).
- The specific formatting style (e.g., APA, Chicago, MLA) is followed consistently and correctly.

Polishing

- The work has been reviewed, revised, and checked for spelling and punctuation errors. Previous feedback has been addressed.
- There are no errors that alter the meaning of the text or make the writing unclear.
- There are no patterns of errors that need additional attention (e.g., punctuation that is often misused, repeated verb tense errors, multiple sentence fragments, etc.).
- The sentence style clear, engaging, and appropriate.