

Help with Revising: The Art of “Re-Seeing”



Student Name: _____

IST/Peer Tutor Name: _____

Date Completed: _____

Directions: Read through this handout and answer the questions.

What is REVISING? Your answer: _____

Our answer: Revision literally means to “re-see” or “look again” at something with a fresh and critical perspective. While revision typically happens after you’ve completed your first draft, it is an ongoing process of rethinking your essay—the thesis, main ideas, evidence, and organization—and can happen at any time in the writing process.



What isn’t REVISING? Your answer: _____

Our answer: It’s not really editing or proofreading! Fixing commas, spelling, formatting, and word choice is called proofreading. Revising is about making your ideas stronger. It’s about heavily considering your reader and whether they would find your essay clear, effective, and interesting. It’s also about being willing to do a little (or a lot of) “surgery” to your essay, meaning, moving around paragraphs, cutting out sentences, or even whole paragraphs, coming up with more evidence to defend your points, or changing your thesis. It might mean completely changing your ideas if you no longer agree with them. In some instances, it might mean scratching what you have and starting fresh with revised ideas. You might be thinking, this is going to take more than just a few minutes. And you are right. When you revise, give yourself plenty of time, and have the courage to do some “surgery.” We guarantee you, your essay will be stronger after doing so!



Why is REVISING important? Your answer: _____

Our Answer: When you write something, you are discovering your ideas, so that first writing is not usually your best stuff; it’s just a starting point. Revision is a chance for you to look over your writing and think critically about the following:

1. Are all of my points worth saying?
2. Did I actually say what I wanted to say?

3. Will the reader understand my ideas?

Common Student Concern #1: “Whenever I revise, I just make things worse. I do my best work without revising.”

This is a misconception that is sometimes rooted in fear, and other times in laziness. The truth is that with the exception of those rare moments of inspiration when our ideas are flowing effortlessly, ALL experienced writers revise their work. Hemingway rewrote the last page of *A Farewell to Arms* thirty-nine times!

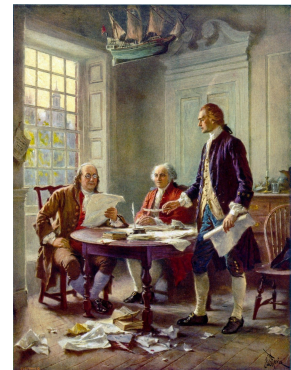
Common Student Concern #2: “I can’t delete or change what I wrote because I already spent so much time on it. And I really love some of my sentences. I already did my best.”

This mentality can really get in the way of making your essay even stronger. Our advice--don’t fall in love with what you have written. We know that sounds harsh, but if you do, you will be hesitant to change it even if you know it’s not great. Start out with a “working thesis,” and don’t act like you are married to it. Instead, act like you’re dating it, seeing if you’re compatible, finding out what it’s like from day to day. If a better thesis comes along, let go of the old one.

Fun Fact #1: 90% of the writing process is revision. That’s a lot of revising! That means we as writers are constantly evaluating and reevaluating whether (1) our points are meaningful, (2) we are saying our ideas in a way that others will understand. Consider the math--if you’re not revising, then you are only doing 10% of the work involved in writing an essay!

Fun Fact #2: Thomas Jefferson wrote the first draft of the Declaration of Independence in two weeks, but his work was far from being over. The document was revised by John Adams and Benjamin Franklin. How many times do you think they revised it together? ____ Once the document was presented to Congress, how many additional revisions do you think were made? _____

Answers: They revised it together 47 times! After presenting to Congress, it was revised another 39 times! Wow!



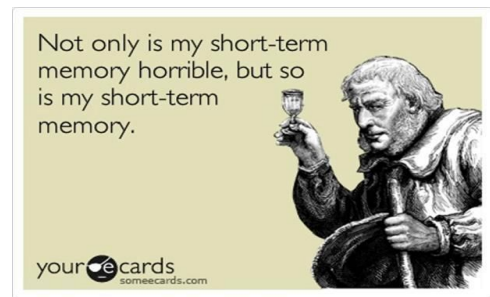
List some strategies you use for **REVISING** your paper:

Here are some of our REVISION suggestions:

1. Give yourself some time away from your essay so you can return to it with a fresh mind. When you re-read it, be honest, and don't be lazy. Ask yourself what you really think about your paper.
2. Think BIG, don't think small. Us writing instructors call this the difference between global and local errors. "Global" refers to revising--the ideas, the structure, the balance, the flow. "Local" refers to proofreading--commas, verb tense, word choice, etc. To revise well, you'll need to think globally and resist the urge to fix small grammatical or formatting errors in the process. After all, if you spend an hour proofreading a paragraph in your essay, but haven't revised yet, you might later realize that your essay would be stronger without the paragraph there at all. Oh the agony of that wasted hour!
3. Reacquaint yourself with the purpose of your essay. If your intent is to persuade, are you making a strong argument? Is your purpose to analyze? To review? Check your thesis and introduction to ensure your focus is in line with the purpose of the essay. This might mean you find that writing prompt your instructor gave you and re-read it closely to make sure you are fully and accurately answering the prompt.
4. If you are just too close to the essay, and you can't imagine how to make the essay stronger, make an appointment with a writing tutor at the WRC. Sometimes a fresh pair of eyes means borrowing someone else's to get make sure your writing is clear.

Let's try a revising strategy that involves a kid-like imagination.

Directions: Print out a copy of your essay and have a pen or pencil in your hand. (It's okay if it's a first draft at this point, or a fifth draft and nearly ready to submit. Remember, revision happens throughout the whole writing process). Now, in order to really think like a reader and read over your essay with a fresh pair of eyes, pretend you have amnesia. In other words, pretend you recall nothing about your paper. You don't remember what it's about. You don't even remember writing it. If that feels too weird, you can pretend that you are someone else, like your friend or teacher, and you are reading the essay sitting in front of you for the first time. The point is to think like a reader, not like the writer of the essay! Make sure the person you pretend to be is honest, smart, and ready to work. Now, let's get our scrubs on and do some surgery...oops...we mean, revising!



1. Read over the **title** of the essay if you see one. Then, make a prediction. Based on the title, what do you think the essay will be about? Are you excited to read what's in front of you based on the title?

2. Read the introduction and thesis then make another prediction before you keep reading. Based on the title, intro, and thesis, what do you think the essay will be about?

3. Is the thesis where most readers would expect it to be? Does the thesis make a sophisticated, provocative stance, or does it just say what anyone could say if given the same topic? Does your thesis generalize instead of taking a specific position? Do you agree with the thesis?

4. Now, let's read just the topic sentences of each of the body paragraphs. Resist the urge to read the whole paragraph; we will do that later. Underline the most general statement in each of the body paragraphs, then jot down a prediction for each paragraph below.

5. Do each of the topic sentences support the thesis? For each topic sentence write "supports" or "does not support" in the margin next to the sentence.

6. Now, you can read through each of the body paragraphs. Stop after each body paragraph to answer the following questions (write your answers in the margin of the paragraph).

- a. Does the paragraph support and explain the topic sentence?
- b. Does the writer include convincing, relevant, vivid, and/or persuasive details to support the claim in the topic sentence? Write "vivid details" or a related comment in the margin, or write "needs more specific and persuasive details about ____" or a related comment in the margin.

7. Reread the entire essay straight through, and then spend some time answering the questions below:

- a. Is the focus of the essay appropriate for the assignment? Is the topic too big or too narrow? Does the writer stay on track through the entire paper? Is the purpose of the writing clear to the reader?

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- b. Does the paper follow through on what the thesis promises? Does the writer support all the claims in the thesis? Are the tone and formality of the language appropriate for the audience?

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- c. Does the organization of the ideas make sense? Does the writer transition from one point to the next? Do the topic sentences of each paragraph appropriately introduce what the paragraph is about? Would the paper work better if you

moved the things around?

- d. Are the quotes and examples working to support the topic sentences? Does the writer accurately interpret and explain the quotes, and then connect them to their ideas?

- e. Does the conclusion tie the paper together smoothly and end in a thoughtful way, or does it simply restate what's already been said and end in a quick and redundant way.

8. How do you now “re-see” your essay? Reflect on what you got out of this revision activity in the space below.



Works Consulted

The Writing Center, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. “Revising Drafts.” 4 September 2019.