

## ESSAY REVISION

**Revision** describes the process of re-reading and improving an essay by **focusing on the coherence** (or logical organization) of the paper. Revision therefore involves asking whether or not the essay content and structure effectively communicates the main point or purpose of the paper.

**Proof-reading** focuses more on correcting **sentence-level mistakes**. It describes the process of re-reading an essay in order to check it for errors in grammar, sentence structure and word choice, as well as for errors in formatting (like font and margin size) and citation. Proof-reading is usually the last stage of the writing process.

**Editing** is another term your professors or markers might use. Generally, editing is used to describe **both revision and proof-reading**. Strong writers always both revise and proof-read their work.

## REVISION TECHNIQUES

### REVISING YOUR THESIS STATEMENT

1. **Reading Your Roadmap:** A strong thesis statement functions like an outline or roadmap for the rest of your essay. It not only indicates the main idea or argument of the essay, it also indicates what proofs or points you will discuss in support of that idea *in the order that they will appear in the body of the essay*. After writing your first draft, check the body paragraphs against the “roadmap” in your introduction or thesis statement. Do they match up? If not, revise either the thesis statement or the order of the body paragraphs.
2. **The What, How & Why:** Every argumentative thesis statement must answer three questions: What, How, and Why. The “what” is the main idea or argument; the “how” are the proofs you will use to support that argument; and the “why” is the significance of the argument. After writing a draft of your essay, put it aside. Then, on a separate piece of paper, write in your own words a separate answer (a sentence or keywords) next to the following questions: “What is my main idea or point?,” “How do I prove it?,” and “Why is it important?”. If you have difficulty QUICKLY and SUCCINCTLY writing out your responses to any of these questions, it is a sign that you need to do some more work on your thesis statement. Re-read your notes, research, primary sources, drafts, and do some free-writing until you are able to quickly answer these questions. Then, check your answers to the thesis statement in your draft essay. Does your thesis statement convey each of the answers effectively? Revise if necessary.
3. **The So-What Test:** The “why” part of a thesis statement is the part that lets your reader know why it’s important for them to read your essay. Having an effective answer to the question, “Why is this important,” or, “So what?” can move your thesis statement from a bland statement of fact to an interesting argument or claim. To check to see if your thesis statement answers the question of why

it is significant, pretend that your thesis is an answer to a question. Write that question down. Does it begin with “how” or “why”? If not, then your thesis is likely still descriptive, rather than argumentative, and therefore does not address why its central claim or idea is important.

## REVISING THE BODY OF YOUR PAPER

1. **Margin Notes:** In the margins next to each body paragraph, write down 2-4 keywords describing it. Next, underline your topic sentences (the first one or two sentences of each paragraph). Do your topic sentences reflect the keywords you’ve listed? If not, revise. The first one or two sentences of each body paragraph must function like the spine of a book: like a book spine, a topic sentence of a paragraph allows your reader to quickly and easily understand what it is about.
2. **Checking for Coherence:** It is important that each paragraph logically supports the main point of your essay, or a particular section of the essay. If your paragraphs do this, you will have a “coherent”—or, logical—essay. To check the coherence of your essay’s logic, underline each topic sentence. Ask yourself two questions: Does each topic sentence indicate the topic of its paragraph?, and, Does it indicate WHY the paragraph is discussing that topic? Another way to phrase this question is: Do my topic sentences explain why each paragraph is important to the main point/argument of the essay?
3. **Reverse Outlining:** Once you have finished writing a draft of your paper, go back and copy the following parts and paste them as a bulleted list in a new document, like the outline to the right. Once you have completed your reverse outline, consider whether the “bare bones” of your essay flow logically. Do you have transition sentences or words connecting each paragraph? Does the order of the paragraphs make sense? Does each paragraph support your thesis statement? Do the paragraphs appear in the order that the “How” line of your outline promises?

### Reverse Outline Format

- I. Thesis Statement
  - a. What
  - b. How
  - c. Why
- II. Topic Sentence #1  
Transition Sentence/Word
  - a. Point #1
  - b. Point #2, etc...
- III. Topic Sentence #2...
- IV. Concluding re-wording of your main point or argument

## REVISION AT THE SENTENCE LEVEL

1. **Eliminating Wordiness:** Ever see “wordy” scrawled across a paper an instructor has just returned to you? This can mean a few different things: either you use extra, unnecessary words in your writing, or you use unnecessarily complicated or obscure words. Sometimes, writers are guilty of both. To edit for wordiness, take one paragraph at a time

*The study ~~did have some limitations as it was limited to young people only and did not account for gender.~~ However, ~~the authors of the study write that there are two potential future directions research could take to properly address these significant shortcomings.~~*

and reduce it to AS FEW WORDS AS POSSIBLE. Cut any and all unnecessary language. One way to help you decide if a word is really necessary or not is to ask yourself, “Does this word add anything to what I’m saying?” or, “If I remove this word, and read the sentence without it, does the meaning of the sentence change significantly?”

2. **Complex but not Complicated:** Sometimes a writer is accused of being “wordy” because she or he uses unnecessarily complicated language. However, a paper might also sound wordy or repetitive if it doesn’t use complex sentences. Complex sentences are not necessarily complicated—complex sentences are simply sentences that join two thoughts or ideas with “that,” “which,” or “whose.” These types of sentences are important because they allow us to convey complex ideas. To check if you use complex sentences in your writing, do a word search on your word processor for each of these words. If they don’t appear, re-read your paper and underline sentences that are linked in content, theme or subject matter. Next, try to join them with “that,” “which,” or “whose.” You may need to rearrange the order of your sentences.

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