



NO. 4 IN THE WRITING CENTER HANDOUT SERIES

Making It Perfect: Revising Your Draft

You just finished your first draft, but before you turn it in you should do one more thing: revise. Here are some easy ways to help you look back over your draft and polish it.

Take a break.

Before attempting to revise your essay, take a break. Thinking about something else will give your mind a rest so you can return to the paper refreshed.

Stage One: The Big Picture.

- The first stage of revising should focus on the big picture — addressing the content and organization of your draft as a whole. Here are some suggestions for approaching this stage:
 - Look at the **CONTENT** of your draft. Check to be sure that...
 - ✓ Your thesis is original. An original thesis should introduce a new idea to the reader.
 - ✓ Your thesis is arguable. Could someone feasibly argue the other side of your thesis?
 - ✓ The language and ideas of your thesis are carried throughout the rest of your essay.
 - ✓ Your points are developed using specific examples.
 - ✓ Your points are based in analysis, not summary. (See Handout No. 13)
 - Look at the **ORGANIZATION** of your draft. Check to be sure that...
 - ✓ Your ideas flow logically from one paragraph to another.
 - ✓ Your ideas on a specific topic or point are grouped in one section of the essay, not spread throughout.
 - ✓ Your points are organized with a clear purpose in mind.
 - ✓ Your points serve as support or proof of your thesis.

Stage Two: The Closer Look.

- The second stage of revising should focus on the smaller picture — refining the content and organization of your individual paragraphs and points. Here are some suggestions for approaching this stage:
 - Look at the **CONTENT** and **ORGANIZATION** of your points. Check to be sure that...
 - ✓ The points within the paragraphs follow a logical sequence.
 - ✓ Each paragraph includes a transition from one point or example to another.
 - ✓ Each paragraph includes a main idea or topic sentence.
 - ✓ Each paragraph includes specific examples that support the main idea of the paragraph as well as the thesis of the paper.
 - ✓ Each paragraph includes a concluding sentence that links the point to the thesis.
 - Look at the **CLARITY** of your points. Check to be sure that...
 - ✓ The points within the paragraphs are concise and direct, but substantial.
 - ✓ The points within the paragraphs have precise word choice and varied sentence structure.

(continued on reverse)



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Making It Perfect: Revising Your Draft, Continued

Outline.

- To help complete these stages of revision, make an outline of your draft. Write down your thesis, the topic sentence of each paragraph, and the transitions you use between main points.
- An alternative to outlining is to highlight or underline your thesis and main points on your draft. This strategy makes it easier to assess how well the essay is organized.
- Make notes in the margins about each point. Ask yourself, “So what?” “Why is this significant?” “Why should my reader care about this topic?” “What is the bigger point I am trying to make?” The answers to these questions should be clear in your thesis and throughout your essay.

Read the draft aloud.

- After you have revised, take the time to read your draft aloud. You may hear problems or errors that your eyes do not catch, including awkward transitions or wording and grammar mistakes.

For more information on revising your drafts, see

The St. Martin's Handbook (5th ed): 83-145

The Scribner Handbook for Writers (2nd ed), Allyn and Bacon: 17-19, 692-694

<http://www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/WC/reveessay.html>

<http://www.hamilton.edu/academic/Resource/WC/Revision.html>