

The Revision Process

As you write papers on tricky subjects, you're bound to make some mistakes, so it's essential to revise your work. You can make sure that you've performed to the best of your ability so that you can receive a higher grade and learn more along the way. Sometimes, you'll find huge mistakes, while other times you'll find only small errors. Whatever the case, you're better safe than sorry, as the old saying goes. Let's see how you can spot ways to improve your essays.

Do as You're Told

Reread the teacher's prompt and directions before you revise. You want to make sure you followed all the instructions and covered everything required of you.

- If your paper doesn't address everything it's supposed to, you're setting yourself up for a mediocre grade!

Look at the Big Picture

Remember that there's more to revision than merely checking your grammar and spelling. You are seeing whether or not you have clearly made a compelling argument and completed all parts of the assignment properly.

- Have you used all the relevant evidence available to you, and have you used it effectively?

- Is there anything important you are leaving out?

- Remember that effective revision involves examining not just what's there, but also considering what could or should be there.

- Are there any holes in your reasoning?

- Is every point you've made clear and relevant?

- Could your sentences or paragraphs be arranged into a clearer structure?

- Holistic concerns like these are harder to revise than, say, spelling slip-ups, but they'll ultimately affect the quality of your paper (and your grade) much more.

- The misconception that revision is just changing your wording and punctuation holds back so many young writers. Don't let it chain you up.

- Particularly, I've read that inexperienced writers tend to obsess over making sure their wording isn't repetitive rather than examine whether or not their argument is clear, convincing, and flows well.

- You can go into the nitty-gritty details of grammar and wording after you're sure you've elaborated on your thesis statement well.

It's Dangerous to Go Alone

If you have a friend in the same class, consider exchanging papers with them and revising together.

- If you want to get to know someone better, this could be a smooth lead-in.
- A fresh set of eyes is always helpful for finding confusing sections or gaps in your logic.

Be Specific

Keep an eye out for vague words like *thing*, *good*, and *bad*. Replace them with more specific words.

- For instance, instead of, “The scientist took apart the strange thing,” try, “The scientist took apart the strange steel cube and its colorful wiring.”

- And look at this sentence: “Nina Harukaze is a good author.” That could be interpreted in roughly 255 billion ways. Is she prolific? Insightful? Eloquent? Famous? Kind? Educational? Entertaining? Profitable? A combination thereof? You have to let the reader know!

- If there are any vague words you tend to abuse, consider searching for them using the “find” feature in your word processor. In Microsoft Word, you can search for certain words by hitting CTRL + F.

Root out Redundant Repetition

On that note, use CTRL + F and “highlight all” in Microsoft Word to see if you’ve used a certain word too often. I’d save this for the end of your editing, once you’re sure that the essentials are all in order.

- Keep in mind, though, that your main topic should be restated often, so repetition doesn’t always mean your writing’s dry. If you’re discussing how Egdon Heath influences the storyline of *Return of the Native*, don’t be afraid if you see the word *heath* a lot. The whole point of your essay should appear a lot!

Keep Verbs in Tense

Make sure your verb tense is consistent. If you change from one tense to another, you should have a reason for doing so.

Maintain a Cutting Room Floor

If you have to remove a sentence or more, I would recommend cutting and pasting the material into a separate computer document specifically labeled for discarded material. That way, if you ever change your mind, you can bring it back.

Find Your Flow

Every sentence should flow naturally into the next. It’s never an encouraging sign if you can rearrange your sentences in almost any way you choose. You’re probably making a bunch of random points rather than developing cohesive ideas.

- Transitional phrases such as *moreover* or *however* often show how one sentence leads into the next, so they can guide you and your reader. Be sure to check out my page called “Transitional Phrases!”

Focus, Focus, Focus!

Listening to music and texting your friends while looking at the computer screen is not revision.

Say It Loud, Say It Proud

Revise *at least* once by reading the paper aloud. It's amazing what crappy wording or blatant errors you'll catch.

Revision Matters

Do not treat revision like an afterthought.

- As I've mentioned elsewhere, studies have shown that catching mistakes on your own helps you understand grammatical rules and your paper's concepts better. Plus, you might as well learn something at your insanely expensive college.

- And besides, if you went to all the work of researching and writing, then you shouldn't let that time be wasted on a bad grade. Revise so that you'll get a good grade and all your efforts will be worth it. Don't be like a runner who decides to take a break before reaching the finish line!

Learn from Your Mistakes

When you get your paper back, thoroughly look over everything your teacher marked. If something seems unclear to you, then ask that educator of yours to explain it. If you just look at the grade and toss it aside, expect to make the same mistakes again on the next paper. And the next one. And the next one. And the next one. And the next one.

- You might as well learn something from the assignment!

- Some especially helpful teachers comment on not only your mistakes but also your strongest points. Knowing what parts of the paper you did well on can be incredibly beneficial to your writing as a whole.

Revision can be a daunting process, especially after you've gone to so much work to write the paper in the first place. However, you're not really done with an essay until you've checked your reasoning and your wording to ensure that you've made a clear, compelling point. If you revise well, then you can expect your understanding of the subject—and your grades—to soar!

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