Revisions and Edits

Purpose: This group of activities will lead you through the final steps in the writing process: the editing and revision steps. Although these activities are designed for and address a manuscript that is nearing completion of the drafting stage, it is worth noting that many writers choose to undergo editing and revision even when while in their drafting stage.

Consider this: What's the difference between editing and revising? Editing tends to refer to corrections made to the sentence level grammatical, sentence structural, and mechanical aspects of writing. It can also refer to formatting corrections. Revisions, on the other hand, deal with changes to the paper overall, particularly about the organizational structure, arguments, evidence, focus, and voice of the work. Rather than thinking of revisions as "corrections," it may be wiser to think of these changes as strengthening, expanding on, and clarifying ideas within the paper.

So which goes first?

For this kind of manuscript, as well as all manuscripts, we recommend starting with revision's larger concerns and then moving to final edits afterward. Why? Firstly, because during the revision process, entire sections might be added, removed, or significantly changes. Paragraphs, pages, or chapters might shift, making it important to add in or take out transitional sentences or sources that no longer make sense, causing you to redo grammatical and mechanical changes. Secondly, your committee may require significant additions to or changes to your manuscript before or after your final defense. These committee revisions may undo your careful sentence and grammar changes. However, this is not to say that you should do *no* editing before providing your manuscript to your committee; we simply suggest that you be fully aware of the process that might occur.

Final Revising

Part 0: "PREvision" – Determine all of your points and make sure that they're in the order that you want. Consider your work as a whole. Imagine that you are explaining it to three people, and then jot down the following bits of information:

	Your Advisor	An Expert in Your Field Who You Met Today	A close relation who knows nothing about your work.
What is the main topic of my work?			
What is the secondary topic of my work?			
What is my main argument/hypothesis?			

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What researchers and sources do I mainly use to make my arguments?			

Revising Global Layer - Identifying Gaps in Your Research

Early in your writing process, you were asked to identify gaps in the larger research in general. One of the goals of developing your manuscript should be to fill these gaps—to talk about topics or develop arguments that other researchers have not talked about or have not talked about enough. Use a similar process to identify any gaps in your *own* research. Consider this:

- What is most interesting or striking about your argument/topic/question?
- What key terms are associated with the problem?
- Does *your* work address all of the relevant terms? What terms did you not explain? What terms did you choose not to explain?
- Does *your* work cover the same ground as other researchers? How does it depart from their work?
- Does *your* work address the population that is most affected or interested in the problem?
- Is your work accessible to outsiders to the issue? What do outsiders need to know that insiders do not?
- What were the limitations of your study? What resources (time, funds, population, other) forced you to change tactics in your research? What information were you expecting to find but unable to trace?
- What advice would you give to someone who would need to repeat your process?

Revising Layer 1 - Topic Sentences

At this level of academic writing, a good topic sentence is as direct as possible. Always refer to your basic writing tools: the 5 Ws.

1. -What is the topic? *This is a thesis about cats. Cats have become too cute.*
2. -Who needs to know? And who are the relevant parties involved/affected? *Veterinarians have determined that cats have become too cute.*
3. -Where is the relevant population located? *Canadian veterinarians have determined that cats are "too cute."*
4. -When was research conducted? *Canadian veterinarians have determined that cats have been trending toward "too cute" in the last five years.*
5. -Why is it relevant? What other *why* questions are relevant? You can also try answering a why question rather than asking one. (This might be a secondary topic more related to your argument or research question.) *If Canadian veterinarians are ever going to harness*

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the power of cats as pest-hunters, it is essential that researchers understand why cats are getting cuter. Cats are getting cuter as part of a global scheme.

Ideal topic sentences provide only the information that is immediately relevant. It should not be too specific (providing every answer) or too general (providing only one answer). Although it may be tempting to write an extremely specific topic sentence right from the beginning, remember that information may be introduced in secondary sentences. Our recommendation is to include at least 2 answers in the topic sentence, but no more than 4.

Revising Layer 2- Paragraphs

-If a paragraph is more than one page long (e.g., it begins at the bottom of page 1 and ends at the top of page 3) it is too long and needs to be split up.

-Split paragraphs when you do any of the following things: introduce a new topic; change to a new "scene," "setting," or "location"; when you bring in a contrasting point or counterargument; when you are building on a very complex topic and are about to get to an even more complex topic; to emphasize an idea that is particularly important; when the paragraph is too long.

Revising Layer 3 - Sentences

Sentence Variety—Many academics believe that every sentence needs to be a complex one in order to be "good" or "smart." Truthfully, readers can become lost in a sea of complex and compound sentences, which can cause readers to lose out on key information unnecessarily.

There are different schools of thought on when to mix the use of these sentences. Our recommendation for graduate level writing is that for every 3 or 4 complex sentences, you create one simple sentence. We also recommend not placing 2 simple sentences in a row unless there are no other options—advanced readers tend to notice too many simple sentences together, and they become distracted thinking, "Why didn't the writer combine these sentences together?"

-Split sentences when you meet any of the following conditions: have more than 2 independent clauses put together; need to introduce a new idea; are mixing declarative statements, questions, or exclamatory sentences; have three complex sentences one after another; need to introduce a new direct quotation.

Revising Layer 4 - Transition Sentences

Frontloading—The act of "frontloading" is creating a transition sentence at the start of a new paragraph. This transition sentence should refer to items and ideas from the previous paragraph or section and their relationship to the upcoming paragraph or section.

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EX—{This is the end of a paragraph} If the seas continue to rise, experts say that populated areas closest to sea level may be evacuated or face complete destruction eventually.

Although seas are undoubtedly rising, they are not as immediate of a concern as smog population in dense urban areas, which have seen emission levels skyrocket in the twenty-first century. {This is the start of a paragraph}

The bolded text represents the "frontloaded" transition sentence. It mirrors language between the previous paragraph ("rising sea level") while also acting as a topic sentence for the upcoming topics (answering *what*, *where*, and *when*). It is also ideal to move to a new paragraph here because this new paragraph both introduces a new topic and provides a contrast or counterpoint from the previous topic.

Backloading—The inverse of frontloading, "backloading" is the act of placing a transition sentence at the end of one paragraph before the beginning of the next.

EX—{This is the end of a paragraph} If the seas continue to rise, experts say that populated areas closest to sea level may be evacuated or face complete destruction eventually. **Despite the attention that rising sea levels are gaining, scientists are concerned that they are not receiving attention quickly enough.**

One concern that is receiving plenty of attention as of late is the environmental cost of deforestation. {This is the start of a paragraph}

The bolded text here represents the "backloaded" transition sentence. It follows many of the same moves as the frontloaded transition, but it is attached much more closely to the ideas of the previous sentence. The author has chosen not to mirror the language of the upcoming paragraph or introduce any of the answers for the upcoming topic sentence. Even so, it is clear that the author is beginning a transition, using words that denote contrast ("Despite") before moving to a new idea.

Which one is better? That depends on your level of comfort as a writer! Some writers prefer one move over the other, while other writers use some combinations, answering some of the topic questions in one transition before reasserting them in the next. For example:

Despite the attention that rising sea levels are gaining, scientists in places like China are concerned that the focus on sea diminishes scientific focus on land.

While sea levels have risen in small increments over the last five years, smog levels in Beijing have risen nearly twice as fast in the same amount of time.

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Some authors might argue that this much transitional padding may become distracting. Always consider the needs of the audience and the readability of your work when creating transitions.

Transition with frontloading and backloading when appropriate

- Does one sentence lead naturally into another?
- Are the sentences too short? Can these sentences be combined?
- Is there a need for additional details?
- Are your sentences too long? Can these sentences be divided?
- Have you checked for common mechanical errors such as subject-verb agreement, pronoun reference, and missing or extra commas?

Revising Layer 5 – Active Voice Vs. Passive Voice

The two kinds of "voices" in writing style are all about action. Specific, these voice styles are about *who* is doing the action.

Active Voice: The researchers collected as many cats as possible.

Passive Voice: As many cats as possible were collected.

In Active Voice, the emphasis is placed on a clear sentence subject, telling the audience who did the action. In this case, it is apparent that specific researchers carried out the action.

In Passive Voice, the emphasis is placed on the thing being acted on, with much less concern for who has done this thing to them. Passive voice tends to use verbs combined with a form of "to be" (were, was, are, etc).

Which is better?

Although most writers tend to agree that Active Voice is the preferred style of voice for sentences in general, Passive Voice has its place in academic writing. Sometimes it is irrelevant for the audience to know who is doing an action. Other times, the actor is an unknown element. Still other times, the actor is implicit, and it is better not to draw attention to them.

Active Voice not necessary: Researcher Garcia conducted the experiment on 200 cats.

Passive Voice preferred: 200 cats were involved in this experiment.

Passive Voice, actor is unknown: Data from over 200 was gathered in this research.

Active Voice, actor is unnecessary: This thesis will delve into the mysteries of cats.

Passive Voice, actor is implied: The mysteries of cats are more relevant than ever today.

Revising Layer 6 - Undo Jargon

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Near the end, identify, undo or clarify the jargon in your writing. What is "jargon" in academic writing? Jargon is the specific words, expressions, and language used by a particular profession or group. In academic writing, jargon is widespread, and the specifics of its words varies between fields. By recognizing key types of jargon in your academic field, you will know when and when not to use jargon in your writing.

Good times to use jargon:

-You are speaking about something technical; your audience has been informed about the definition and terms of a bit of vocabulary; there is no other way to substitute the word choice you need.

Bad times to use jargon:

-You are trying to make your sentences appear fancier; you want to take up space in your writing; you have not yet defined key terms to your audience or are unaware of what your audience knows about the subject.

What jargon exists in your field? Consider: What are the complex topics in your writing? Do you define unfamiliar, recently discovered, or terms or ideas that are brought in from outside fields or sources? Should you?

The best way to undo jargon? Find it all. Highlight it in your writing. Then consider the needs of your audience. If you wouldn't expect the audience to know it, consider defining or clarifying.

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Revising Layer 7 - Eliminate Clutter – Common "Wordiness" Phrases

This is a list of the most common wordiness phrases:

- Due to the fact that = Because
- Because of the fact that = Because
- In the event that = If
- In order to = To
- In spite of the fact that = Although
- It would appear that = Apparently
- With regard to = Regarding
- In many cases = Often
- In most cases = Usually
- It is probable = Probably

There are two schools of thought on the best way to eliminate clutter. First, you need to recognize it in your own writing. Second, you need to recognize when other people are doing it. To recognize it in your own writing, let's try something counterintuitive: intentionally putting it in there! Write a short paragraph using *only* the wordiest phrases you can come up with. Here's our example:

Cluttered: Due to the fact that the dog under my ownership appeared to be unable to resume his sleep cycle with the ease one would expect, I made the decision to contact my local veterinarian with regard to my concerns in order to determine the most likely causes for the dog I care for being unable to properly rest. The doctor who cares for animals and specializes in their medical treatment discussed several possibilities that may be the cause of my animal's struggles with restfulness, and the veterinarian and I determined it would be the best course of action to bring my companion to the office at which the doctor was located and worked. The doctor performed several tests with instruments of his specialty to determine that in cases such as the canine companion with whom I live, dogs who are younger tend to be fuller of energy than dogs who are older. The veterinarian wrote a prescription of two walks per 24 hour cycle for my pet.

Not cluttered: My dog couldn't sleep, so I called the vet, who told me it was because my dog isn't using up enough of his puppy energy. The vet told that I need to walk my dog twice a day.

Note how also that in the cluttered example above, we included several unnecessary synonyms and clunky definitions for words that could be stated much more simply. This could be jargon.

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Make it an activity: With a group of friends, see who can write the longest half-page paragraph and reduce it to the smallest amount of words with the same general meaning. The one who trims down the clutter most wins! Bonus points for conveying complex meanings.

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