

The Revision Division

When revising an essay draft, it's a bad idea to just start at the beginning, read through what you wrote, and hope that you instinctively spot and correct all the issues. To your mind, all the ideas seem well-stated and all the support seems well-done when you look at your essay as a whole. To your mind, your essay seems natural and correct and good. So, to trick your mind, you have to work through your essay in parts. Only when you divide up your revision tasks do you really start to see the specific troublesome parts of your essay.

Here's a list of approaches to take when revising: *(Warning: Take each of these tasks just one at a time! Never work on more than one of these at the same time! I'm just saying: It pays to divide up your work. Looking for two of these task at once can result in confusion.)*

1) Thesis (2 tasks):

1a. Look at the end of your essay's very first paragraph. Then look at your essay's very last paragraph. Are there any confusing differences between these two points in your essay? Does your last paragraph say something more strongly than your thesis statement? Does your last paragraph make your overall point better than your thesis statement? If you answered yes to any of these, revise both your thesis and your last paragraph.

1b. Now look at the ends of all of your body paragraphs. Then look back at your thesis statement. Do the ends of each of your paragraphs sound like they simply repeat the thesis? Do the ends of each of your paragraphs not build on your thesis at all? Do you even have something that you could call an actual "end" for each of your paragraphs? If you answered yes to any of these, revise the ends of your paragraphs so that they build on the thesis and add something new.

2) Content (2 tasks):

2a. Take a look at the very first sentence of your essay. Imagine yourself as a reader who is bored, a reader who wants to check your Facebook page right now. Does the first sentence of your essay fail to wake you up? Is your topic not 100% clear by the time you read your very first sentence? Is there any doubt about what you're going to do in your first paragraph by the time you're done reading that first sentence? If so, revise that first sentence.

2b. Now take a look at the first sentence of all your other paragraphs. Imagine that your reader forgets what you're talking about before every paragraph. Does the first sentence of each paragraph wake you up again? Is the new idea of each paragraph not 100% clear after reading just the first sentence? Is there any doubt about what you're going to do in each paragraph after just the first sentence? If so, revise each and every first sentence that needs work.

3) Research (3 tasks):

3a. Take a look at your whole first and last paragraphs of the essay. Think to yourself: “I need certain information to make my point in this essay, and this information is this...” Do your first and last paragraph both clearly refer to the kind of information you would *likely* need? Do your first and last paragraph say *only* stuff about that information? Is it unclear what kind of opinion or response or attitude you have about your needed information? If so, revise these paragraphs.

3b. Take a look at each of your body paragraphs, one by one. For each paragraph, think: “I need certain information for this paragraph, and this information is this...” Does this paragraph avoid *introducing* the information I’m presenting? Does this paragraph avoid *showing* the information I’m presenting? Does this paragraph avoid *explaining* (even going so far as to repeat in different words) the information I’m presenting? Does this paragraph avoid going on to discuss why the kind of information I’m presenting matters to my overall point? If so, revise these paragraphs.

3c. Now, take a look at each paragraph *again*, one by one. For each paragraph, ask yourself, “What questions could someone ask as he or she reads this paragraph?” Does this paragraph save the answer to this question for somewhere else? Does this paragraph avoid answering this question? Is this paragraph missing research that would help me answer this question fully or believably? If you answered yes to any of these, do more research and revise accordingly.

4) Organization (3 tasks):

4a. Take a look at the beginning and end of each paragraph, one by one. Start by focusing on each beginning. Does the beginning bring up too many new ideas? Does the beginning bring up too many old ideas? Does the beginning bring up any ideas what would be unexpected after reading the end of the previous paragraph? Or, for the first paragraph, does the beginning do something that would be unexpected after reading the title? If so, revise the beginning.

4b. Take a look at the beginning and end of each paragraph, one by one. Now focus on the end of each paragraph. Does this end bring up too many old ideas? Does this end avoid talking about the overall thesis in any way? Does this end talk about the thesis too much? Does this end bring up ideas that would be unexpected from reading this paragraph? If so, revise the end.

4c. Go sentence by sentence through your whole essay. Start with the first sentence and go to the second sentence, and so on. Does this sentence start with an idea that is too new? Does this sentence end with an idea that is too old? Is the middle of this sentence too long, too short, or too confusing? Does this sentence deliver too many ideas? If you answered yes to any of these, reorganize your sentence, add to it, or break it up into several different sentences.

5) Documentation (3 tasks):

5a. Take a look at each and every moment in your essay where you use an idea that doesn’t

come from your own personal experience. Do you simply present this idea, then go on? Do you present this idea but then have just a parenthetical statement to cite where it comes from? Do you go on with your discussion without explaining what this idea means? Do you ever start a sentence or paragraph with a quotation? Do you mention an idea from a source, but then give just a partial reminder of where this idea is coming from? If you answered yes to any of these, please consider revising the sentences in which you present your external ideas so that they do a clearer job of *explicitly* presenting where these ideas are coming from.

5b. Take a look at all your Works Cited citations. Think to yourself, “I’m going to enter my essay into a computer, and it will take off points if it doesn’t understand something.” Do you think that a computer, with very strict rules, might fail to understand *perfectly* what your sources for this essay are? If so, revise your Works Cited page! Make sure it’s as correct as you can make it.

5c. Take a look at your in-text citations. Each time, is there any question what information comes from where? Is there any question what sentence the citation belongs to? If you answered yes to one of these questions, revise your citations so they work to your benefit.

6) Correctness (3 tasks):

6a. Make a list of the grammar issues from Essay 1 and Essay 2. One by one, try to spot similar issues in your Essay 3 draft, and correct them if you can.

6b. Take your essay draft to the Writing Center (room AA 229, phone number 703.845.6363) and ask for help spotting and correcting grammar issues.

6c. Pick one paragraph, and copy and paste this paragraph into an email message. Ask a colleague in this class if he or she will look over one paragraph for you, just for grammar issues. Send your email to this colleague, give him/her time to read your paragraph, and talk for 10-15 minutes (no more than that!) about what you might be able to correct.