

Revision and Proofreading: How to Revise Your Own Writing

Revision and proofreading are essential to the writing process and involve more than simply checking your spelling. Think of revision in two stages:

1. Revising for content—meaning and structure
 2. Editing and proofreading—word choice, grammar, punctuation
- Proofreading entails reading for errors, particularly grammar and typos.

Try the below strategies and the checklist on the following page to help you polish your writing.

Revision and Proofreading Strategies

Consider the following revision and proofreading hints. See the *Little, Brown Compact Reader* and the *Purdue Online Writing Lab* for further suggestions.

- ◆ Review professors' comments from previously written papers and consider how that feedback might apply to your current paper.
- ◆ Do some self-assessment. That is, be aware of grammatical or other writing issues that have given you problems in the past. Then, target these areas of your paper as you revise and proofread. Consider keeping a grammar or writing journal to record these issues. As you proofread, look for patterns of errors and include these in your journal as well. For example, if you identify a problem with using commas in a series of items, read through your paper one time (or more), searching only for commas in a series. Repeat this process with other errors to help you focus on one issue at a time.
- ◆ To help in recognizing errors, proofread a hard copy of your paper as opposed to an electronic version.
- ◆ Read the hard copy aloud at a slow, even pace, concentrating on each word *as it appears on the paper*. Avoid reading aloud too quickly, as doing so may cause you to inadvertently substitute your own thoughts for those words that are actually on the page.
- ◆ Use a pencil to follow each sentence as you proofread. This strategy also helps to isolate a sentence, enabling you to focus on each component or word.
- ◆ Proofread the paper backwards to help you focus at the sentence level instead of on the paper's content. Try this strategy *after* you have carefully reviewed your paper's content.
- ◆ Budget sufficient time for larger revisions *and* proofreading prior to handing in a paper. Build time for revision and proofreading into your schedule for any writing assignment.
- ◆ Let the paper sit and marinate. Taking a break from revising or proofreading often helps significantly, allowing the writers to sharpen their focus and to more accurately pinpoint errors.

Revision and Proofreading Checklist

The following questions should help you assess the general quality of your written work. **You may wish to copy this worksheet for each paper that you write.**

Paragraph or Essay Structure

Consider the essay's or paragraph's content and its overall organization.

- Has my writing addressed all of the requirements outlined in the assignment guide?
- Does my paper adhere to the appropriate genre (e.g., narrative, analysis, etc.)?
- Is the opening paragraph adequate as an introduction? That is, does the introduction include relevant background information for the audience and, depending on the assignment, a clear thesis statement that conveys the topic and makes a claim about it?
- Does the thesis statement indicate purpose, essay organization, and, if an argumentative paper, a statement of opinion?
- Do the body paragraphs discuss main points that directly support the thesis?
- Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence which communicates its main idea?
- Is each paragraph unified and coherent (clear and focused on its main idea)? Is the paper logically organized, and does it flow well? Can my reader easily understand my ideas in the manner in which I have organized them?
- Are there enough details and examples to support the topic sentence?
- Are there any points in the paper where the reader is likely to become confused?
- Is the closing paragraph an effective conclusion that does more than simply repeat the introduction?
- Have I included an appropriate title that indicates my paragraph's or essay's topic?

Sentence Structure

Review sentence variety and construction as well as word choice and conciseness.

- Are all sentences complete, containing a subject and a verb?
- Have all comma splices, run-ons, and fragments been edited?
- Are sentences constructed similarly, or have I implemented a variety of sentence lengths and types (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex)?
- Are sentences properly coordinated or subordinated?
- Do my sentences begin differently (prepositional phrase, transition word, dependent clause)?
- Have I used transition words (therefore, however, in addition, etc.) to ensure that my writing flows smoothly, connecting related thoughts or signaling shifts in ideas?
- Have all unnecessary words been omitted? That is, are my sentences concise?
- Have I used precise words and avoided clichés?
- Is my language appropriate for my audience (tone, point of view, word choice)?
- Is my point of view consistent (first person, second person, third person)?
- Have I properly used tense (present, past, etc.)?
- Are all parallel structures balanced?

Grammar

Think about the essay's or paragraph's grammatical elements, particularly those that have been challenging in previous writing assignments.

- Do the subject and verb of each sentence agree?
- Do pronouns properly refer to their antecedents?
- Are irregular verbs used correctly?
- Are there any split infinitives? [A split infinitive occurs when an adverb is improperly placed between "to" and a verb. E.g., I asked my brother to not tease me. (The infinitive "to tease" is awkwardly interrupted by "not." The sentence should read as follows: I asked my brother not to tease me.)]
- Do adjectives and adverbs describe the correct noun or verb?
- Is proper word order maintained within each sentence?
- Are the nouns paired with their appropriate articles in each sentence? Are there any unnecessary articles that need to be removed? Are any nouns which require articles missing them?
- Is vocabulary being used correctly? This can become a problem particularly if unfamiliar words are looked up in a thesaurus and then used in an essay. Always check a dictionary to ensure that a word fits the context in which it is being used.

Mechanics

Pay attention to punctuation, spelling, and formatting.

- Have I proofread for spelling, even *after* using spell-check? A spell checker does not catch all spelling or grammatical errors, and it may even cause errors, especially with homonyms (words such as "their" and "there").
- Are sentences correctly punctuated?
- Are words properly capitalized and/or abbreviated?
- Have I inadvertently omitted any words?
- Have I properly formatted my paper and documented my sources using MLA, APA, or any other documentation method required by my professor? (*Proper formatting usually also includes page numbering, placement of your name and course, among other requirements.)
- Have I correctly acknowledged, according to MLA, APA, or other documentation standards, any outside sources that I have summarized, paraphrased, or quoted?

**** If you are unsure of any of these terms or requirements, ask your instructor or see a tutor. ****

