

REVISION: FROM FIRST TO FINAL DRAFT

by Sharon Williams

Transforming your first draft into a final draft can be a challenging process. The following questions may guide you as you decide **what** and **how** to revise.

Questions to Ask Yourself

THE INTRODUCTION

1. Do I catch the reader's interest, provide relevant background, and narrow the topic into a thesis sentence? Does the **thesis** encompass all of my key ideas? Can I underline the thesis to make sure that it is clearly stated? Do I need to adjust the thesis--either broaden or narrow it?

THE DISCUSSION

2. Have I clearly organized my **paragraphs**, using one main idea per paragraph?
Have I included a **topic sentence** to introduce the main idea for each paragraph? Do I need to adjust any topic sentences in any way?
3. Have I used **transitions** as links back to the thesis and to preceding paragraphs?
4. Does my **argument**:
 - have a clear structure? (Can I easily outline it? Can someone else?)
 - develop in the most logical order? Would a different organization be more effective?
 - respond in sufficient depth to all aspects of the assignment?
5. Do I have enough **evidence**, or too much? Does my evidence advance the argument in some way, without repeating the same points? Does each sub-argument have enough explanation and support (quotations, detailed discussion of events or language,...)?
6. Do I explain in my own words the significance of all quotations? Am I using quotations to support my own analysis? Am I using the documentation method my professor requires?

THE CONCLUSION

7. Does my **conclusion** bring my argument to a close? Does it tie the argument together in such a way that the reader knows my purpose in writing this paper? Does it accomplish more, such as provide a broader context for the topic, propose a course of action, offer a new perspective on the topic, or end with an interesting twist? Do I leave my reader with something to ponder?

(Over)

Sentence-Level Revision:

8. What **grammatical and stylistic** concerns do I see? Have I written with clarity and conciseness? Check for the following:*

- correct word choice, punctuation, spelling
- clear pronoun reference (tip: avoid '*this is*,' '*it is*,' and '*that is*' constructions)
- consistent verb tense
- variety in sentence structure

*(For further explanation of these concerns, see relevant handouts at the Writing Center or Writing Center website.)

9. Is the emotional **tone** I use appropriate for my audience and topic?

10. What more could I say in the next draft? Could I strengthen my argument with further evidence, provide a broader context, or examine counter-arguments?

11. What could I eliminate in the next draft? Have I used irrelevant or repetitive ideas, unnecessary quotations...?

General Suggestions

- Read your draft aloud. We often hear weaknesses in writing more readily than we see them.
- Keep a reader in mind. Ask yourself, "Could someone else understand what I am saying?"
- Have someone else read your draft--a writing tutor, a friend, a roommate. It is very difficult to be objective about your own writing. Be sure to acknowledge all help you receive and make sure there is no conflict of interest if you work with someone else from the same class.

Tips for Maintaining Focus

Make a brief outline as you read your draft, underlining or summarizing in the margin the main idea of each section. Use subheadings. Even if subheadings aren't retained in the final draft, they can be helpful in organizing an argument. Use phrases and sentences that work as links for the reader, a "trail of breadcrumbs" (Jen Klein, '93).

The Final Step

Once you have completed the final revision, it is time for one more effort-- spellcheck and proofread.

**You wrote it; take pride in your final effort.
Proofread!**