Claremont Graduate University
A MEMBER OF THE CLAREMONT COLLEGES

Center for Writing & Rhetoric
150 E. 10th Street
Claremont, CA 91711
909-607-0012
cgu.edu

Revision & Editing Strategies

There are many great strategies for revising, proofreading, and editing. This handout is designed not to give an overview of all of them, but to aid in developing a personal system for revision and editing.

I. Create a Personal Revision Strategy

We only have limited time to devote to a writing task; making the best use of it is an essential part of developing sustainable writing habits. We also usually have the same types of goals for most written projects: clear structure, cohesion, argumentative rigor, logical flow, good style, and clarity. The idea here is to focus on creating and improving a system to get you to those goals instead of only intentionally doing goal setting. Focus on what gets you there and improve that system with experience.

General Tip: Do revision of structure and argument first. Proofread for style and grammar after higher-order revision is finished.

A. Revision Strategy

1. How much time do you have?
2. Plan for at least 2 passes over the paper, 1 for revision and 1 for proofreading. Ideally, more.
3. Know yourself. What do you often have trouble with? What do you do really well? Set out a system to give focus to the former. Plan in more than 1 pass for something you know you need extra work on.
4. Integrate peer review.
5. If helpful, create a checklist of what to do.

B. Revising for Coherence, Structure, and/or Logical Flow of Ideas: Reverse Outlining

1. <u>To review for coherence</u>: highlight each topic sentence or write the main idea of each paragraph as a comment in the margin. Read the paper only looking for how much each paragraph is staying on topic in and of itself.
2. <u>To review for structure</u>: highlight each topic sentence and determine if it is in the right part of the paper, if it is repetitive or unnecessary, and what significance it has for the paper as a whole.
3. <u>To review for logical flow of ideas</u>: set up a blank document and paste all of the topic sentences of your paper onto it in order. Read it over while looking for smoothness of transitions, completeness, and strength. Play devil's advocate. Have you set yourself up for clear counterarguments? Imagining you are a neutral or unsympathetic audience, is your argument as strong as you can make it? Any areas for improvement?

C. Other Resources for Revising your Argument, Audience Analysis, & Evidence

1. See the Writing Across the Curriculum Clearinghouse Handout at:
   https://wac.colostate.edu/resources/writing/guides/argument-revise/

II. Proofreading & Editing

Editing for grammar and style is an important part of the writing process. You want to save yourself work though, and this is most easily done by saving this step for last. Once content revision is completed, you can be sure that the writing you are editing will go towards the final draft. If this step is done too early, you will often spend time editing text that wouldn't have been in the final draft anyhow. As with revision, you want to create a personal system based on your strengths, weaknesses, and needs.

A. Create a Personal Proofreading Checklist & Develop a System
1. Make a list of the areas that you know you have trouble with. If you are unsure, have a friend or writing consultant (at the Center for Writing & Rhetoric) read a draft.
2. If you can, take a pass just focusing on each major area; if not, read looking for numerous areas. This depends on how much time you have and how big/important the problem areas are.
3. Read the paper aloud; many mistakes that might be missed by a read are heard that way.
4. Take time away from the paper and come back (this works for both revision and proofreading).
5. Work to improve your performance in your weak areas little by little over time by developing good habits of proofreading. Over time, those little improvements will lead to better grammar, punctuation, and construction in earlier and earlier drafts.

B. Other Resources for Proofreading, Editing, & Style
1. See the Writing Across the Curriculum Clearinghouse Handout at:
   https://wac.colostate.edu/resources/writing/guides/editing/
2. Utilize books on writing style and choose one point at a time to incorporate. Some examples:
   a. *Stylish Academic Writing* by Helen Sword.
   b. *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr.
   c. *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser.
   d. *Style: Lessons on Clarity and Grace* by Joseph Bizup & Joseph M. Williams.

Your Own Revision Strategy

1. How much time do you have?

2. What are usually your biggest problem areas with structure, organization, coherence, argument, etc.? Create a checklist of **revision** steps.

   1.
   2.
   3.
   4.
   5.

3. What are you going to do for each of these steps?

   1.
   2.
   3.
   4.
   5.

4. What are usually your biggest problem areas with grammar and punctuation? Create a checklist of **proofreading** steps.

   1.
   2.
   3.
   4.

5. What are you going to do for each of these steps?

   1.
   2.
   3.
   4.

6. Remember: the idea is to make small improvements over a period of time and creating a viable system will increase your chances of doing that. Numerous small improvements over time creates major changes.