

## A Checklist for Revision

Whew! You finished a draft of your paper, and now you just need to hand it in... right? Afraid not! Most first drafts still have problems that need to be ironed out. Revision makes the difference between the okay paper you wrote and the good or great paper it could be.

The key is to approach revision positively and work from large to small. This list can help, and remember you can get help from the writing center at any point in the process. Points 1-4 below are about the big picture: ideas, organization, and structure. Points 5-9 are the details: words, sentences, clarity, and artistry. The former are the heart of your writing, and the latter are polish and presentation.

- 1. Take a break and congratulate yourself!** You finished a draft—instead of moving straight into revision, feel good about your accomplishment and do something completely different. When you go to revise, you want to be refreshed and ready.
- 2. Reread your *focus* or *thesis statement*, your *introduction*, and your *conclusion*.** Do they all have the same ideas, or did your thesis evolve while you were writing? Not to worry, it often does—but now is the time to smooth out the bumps. In most papers, your key points should be clear at the beginning *and* the end.
- 3. Glance at the *order of your ideas*.** You want your key points to work together. Are they in the right order? Are any are missing? Do you still have old ones that no longer relate to your thesis?
- 4. Now take the time to *skim each paragraph*.** Does each have a good topic sentence? Is it focused on one idea, or two related ideas? Too many ideas and/or lack of context can confuse your reader. For example, you wouldn't point out a cloud to a friend and say: "See the little nose? And the legs? And the fluffy bits?" Your friend won't understand without context: "That cloud looks like a sheep."
- 5. Take another break!** You aren't done yet, but by this point you are probably getting tired of looking at your own work. This is a particularly good time to get feedback from a friend or visit the writing center. You want to make sure any big-picture issues are sorted out before moving to the small stuff.
- 6. Check the *clarity of your sentences*.** Poor word choice or complicated clauses can obscure your ideas. Try reading sentences aloud—if you trip over something, rephrase it. Avoid unnecessary passive voice, jargon, and "academic-sounding" phrases that are just elaborate nonsense. If you don't quite know what something means, you can bet your readers won't either.
- 7. Edit line-by-line for *spelling and grammar*.** Even if your paper is otherwise perfect, wrong words and grammatical errors can make it frustrating to read. Most word processors check spelling, but you need to double-check. If you wrote "the papal sheep" instead of "the purple sheet," it won't show up in spell-check. Grammar checks are even less reliable, and some even suggest "corrections" that are junk.
- 8. Read over your *citations* and check the formatting.** It's up to you to make sure the data is complete, and the format is correct for your citation style. If you are using a citation manager, *you still have to check the citations*. A program like Zotero, for example, will put "n.d." in places where its data is incomplete, or it may mess up an unusual type of source.
- 9. Take one last break, and then *read the paper from start to finish*.** Assume you've missed something, because you probably have. The final once-over is when you notice that you misspelled the professor's name, or forgot a key citation. It's always good to find that *before* you turn in your paper.

~ By John Dunham, AUNE Writing Center