

# Revising, Editing and Proofreading

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers revising, editing, and proofreading—what each step looks like and how each contributes to creating a successful finished draft. The specific areas of focus include:

1. [Final Stages of the Writing Process](#)
2. [Purpose of Revision](#)
3. [Purpose of Editing](#)
4. [Purpose of Proofreading](#)

## 1. Final Stages of the Writing Process

It's important to remember that writing is a process, not a product. For every finished, polished, solid essay, there were multiple drafts that developed towards that finished piece. Those drafts are necessary for the final piece, so you can't skip any of the steps and still hope to have a successful final version.

After you complete a draft, you'll need to:

- Revise
- Edit
- Proofread

These steps might sound similar, but they're actually distinct parts of the process. Considering them one by one allows you to focus on each individual element carefully.



## STEP BY STEP

1. When you draft, you generate content for the essay; that's the first step.
2. Then, revision is the process of re-envisioning an essay or other writing project. That's where you get to think carefully about the big ideas and how they work in service of your essay's main point.
3. Next you work on editing, which is improving the sentences, word choices, and overall style of an essay or other piece of writing. This is where you focus on making the clearest presentation of your big ideas

using carefully selected language.

4. Finally, you get to proofread, which involves fixing grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and formatting errors in an essay or other piece of writing, and therefore making sure that there are no remaining errors that inhibit your readers' ability to understand your argument.

Each of these steps is part of the same process, improving your writing. Because writing is a recursive project, you might find yourself doing multiple rounds of drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading. Similarly, you need not artificially separate these steps.

If while editing the big ideas, you notice a typo, go ahead and fix it. If while doing final proofreading, you discover that you'd rather phrase something differently than you originally had, go ahead and rewrite that spot. You can and probably should be comfortable working through these steps as much as your essay needs.

But why should you work through the steps? Why should you care about these stages at all? You've spent time and energy writing the essay and now just want to be done with it, but here's the secret: Revising, editing, and proofreading will make all the work you did researching, organizing, and drafting worth it.

The more work you do after your draft, the better your essay will be. If you don't do any of that work, then you might have wasted all of that writing you did in the first place. An essay that's turned in with errors that could have been fixed through editing, revising, or proofreading can cause you to lose credibility with your reader.

Do you trust an argument when you read it and find glaring typos? If an author can't be bothered to proofread, how much do you trust that author to have done careful, trustworthy research?

Your whole purpose for writing the paper might be lost if your paper has:

- Poor organization
- No clear focus
- Not enough supporting evidence
- Broad, vague language
- Unclear word choices
- Choppy sentences
- Errors in the mechanics and grammar of the writing

Therefore, think about these final stages as the quality control of your writing process. Just as a car company has quality assurance, checking each car that comes out of the factory to make sure that it has all the necessary parts, runs correctly, and has a clean paint job, so too should you check your essay to make sure that none of its tires are going to blow off as soon as it gets on the highway.

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## 2. Purpose of Revision

The first stop on the quality assurance assembly line should be **revision**. This is a different stage than editing, which will look at the sentences themselves to assess how well they articulate the argument.

Revision is also different than proofreading, where you'll check your writing to make sure that it follows the rules. There's no sense in doing those two steps, editing and proofreading, if you're going to take out, add in, or otherwise change all those sentences themselves.



Revision is also the stage where getting feedback is the most helpful. You might ask skilled writers for general feedback, but it also helps to ask specific people for feedback. Members of your target audience can tell you if the argument is persuasive. Experts can ensure you are using terminology correctly and understand the key concepts.

Revising is the stage when you think about the big picture of your arguments, assessing your overall argumentation, support, evidence, assertions, etc.

In this step, you might:

- Add in relevant details that you missed the first time through.
- Take out irrelevant content that you now realize doesn't really help your argument.
- Reorder the body paragraphs to change the way your reader works through the argument.
- Research if you find that your argument needs more support or evidence to back up your claims.
- Rethink the thesis statement if it no longer matches your argument.
- Rewrite your introduction and conclusion to reflect those changes.

Many people revise by printing out a draft and writing on it with red pen, doing a reverse outline, or looking through how each paragraph contributes to the thesis. You can do your revision either on paper or on your computer, depending on your personal preference.

Here's what it might look like as you cut, add, move, and change around your writing:

Many people agree on the fact that playing sports is good for the human body. Sports are fun, active ways to engage in teamwork and exercise. ~~Yet, not everybody believes that running long distances, such as 25 miles, is a healthy activity. And let's be honest, running 25 miles is a very long way to go. The only way to make those 25 miles in a decent time is by having good preparation.~~ *(cut stuff about health - not relevant)* Yet, not everybody is included in most sports clubs, teams, and competitions. One example of this is the modern marathon. Almost 150 years ago, the first marathon was held during the Olympic games in Athens. At that time, marathons were men-only races, and women were not permitted to compete. *(Move underlined section to just under the topic sentence) (Add examples: Katherine Switzer running the 1967 Boston Marathon to protest the ban on female runners and Dick Traum as the first person with an amputation to complete the New York City Marathon in 1967)* This shows that accessibility for marathons does matter to many people; otherwise these changes would not have been made. Yet I believe it is time for another change that would be beneficial for today's society. Integrating disabled and abled athletes in national marathons should be required because integrating disabled and abled athletes would reduce discrimination and prejudice. *(explain discrimination and prejudice more)*



## Revision

The process of re-envisioning an essay or other writing project.

# 3. Purpose of Editing

Once you've revised and have a draft that you're sure contains all the info that you want and no info that you don't want, you're ready for **editing** to make sure that the sentences are pulling their weight.

In revising, you've been focusing on re-seeing and rethinking the whole argument's ideas, support, and organization. Here you're going to zoom in a little more closely, just looking at how those ideas are expressed in language.

In other words, this is where you get to think about how your words are working—making sure that they mean what you intend and match the overall tone you want. Editing is also where you assess how your transitions connect ideas in sentences and paragraphs to create a smooth flow of ideas.

During this stage, you'll want to check that your essay has all the elements of style:

- Clarity of ideas
- Precise language
- Effective word choice
- Sentence variety
- Complete sentences

More specifically, you might:

- Look to see if you're repeating your ideas or including redundant information.
- Replace any words that are vague or imprecise with stronger ones that strike the right tone and create vivid impressions.
- Add in or change up your transitions so that you're connecting ideas into sentences and paragraphs intelligently and clearly.
- Check that all of your sentences are complete and that you use a variety of sentence lengths and structures.

In the revised paragraph from above, now that you're ready to edit the language, perhaps you can make this spot more evocative.

Many people agree on the fact that playing sports is good for the human body. Sports are fun, active ways to engage in teamwork and exercise. yet, not everybody is included in most sports clubs, teams, and competitions. This can be considered prejudicial! One example of this is the modern marathon. Almost 150 years ago, the first marathon was held during the Olympic games in Athens. At that time, marathons were

men-only races, and women were not permitted to compete. However, these days, marathons are accessible for men, women, and people with disabilities, and to all different ages. Katherine Switzer ran the 1967 Boston Marathon to protest the ban on female runners and Dick Traum was the first person with an amputation to compete when he ran in the 1976 New York City Marathon. **These fundamental changes could only have been achieved by the actions of passionate people.** Yet, I believe it is time for another change that would be beneficial for today's society. Integrating disabled and abled athletes in national marathons should be required because integrating disabled and abled athletes would reduce discrimination and prejudice.

And in this portion here, you can change up the sentences a little to add some more variety:

Many people agree on the fact that playing sports is good for the human body. Sports are fun, active ways to engage in teamwork and exercise. yet, not everybody is included in most sports clubs, teams, and competitions. This can be considered prejudicial! One example of this is the modern marathon. Almost 150 years ago, the first marathon was held during the Olympic games in Athens. **At that time, marathons were men-only races; women were not permitted to compete. However, these days, marathons are accessible for all: men, women, people with disabilities, and all different ages. In 1967, Kathrine Switzer ran the Boston Marathon, protesting the ban on female runners. Likewise, Dick Traum became the first person with an amputation to compete when he ran in the 1976 New York City Marathon.** These fundamental changes could only have been achieved by the actions of passionate people. Yet, I believe it is time for another change that would be beneficial for today's society. Integrating disabled and abled athletes in national marathons should be required because integrating disabled and abled athletes would reduce discrimination and prejudice.

Those kinds of changes are all editing requires.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Editing

Improving the sentences, word choices, and overall style of an essay or other piece of writing.

## 4. Purpose of Proofreading

You've now got to do a final check to make sure that everything in your essay is where it, and how it, should be. **Proofreading** is where you zoom in your closest to check for the smallest errors in grammar and mechanics.

This is separate from revision and editing because here is where you're making sure that this text is ready for prime time. You're not adding anything new or fundamentally changing the way things are expressed; you're just making sure everything is clean and correct.

Again remember that writing is a process, not a product. Thus, you might notice something to revise or edit while you're proofreading, and that's fine. Go ahead and fix any issues that you notice, but do focus on the small nitty-gritty details of grammar and mechanics.

When you proofread, you should look for:

- Typographical errors (which are usually called typos)
- Grammatical errors, such as shifts in verb tense or errors in plurality or pronoun agreement
- Spelling errors
- Punctuation errors
- Capitalization errors
- Any other basic formatting issues, such as indented paragraphs, double spacing, margins, or font type

One method of proofreading is to enlarge the font on your screen to at least 20 points so that you can see some errors that might have otherwise been hiding in the fine print.

You can see how this works with a portion of the revised and edited sample from before:

Many people agree on the fact that playing sports is good for the humane body. Sports are fun, active ways to engage in teamwork and exercise. Yet, not everybody is included in most sports clubs, teams, and competitions. This, can be considered prejudicial! One example of this is the modern marathon. Almost 150 years ago, the first marathon was held during the Olympic games in Athens.

Once you zoom in, you'll notice the word "human" is misspelled as "humane," and you can fix it. You'll also see an excess comma after the word "this" that you don't need, and you can delete that.

Many people agree on the fact that playing sports is good for the ~~humane~~ human body. Sports are fun, active ways to engage in teamwork and exercise. Yet, not everybody is included in most sports clubs, teams, and competitions. This, can be considered prejudicial! One example of this is the modern marathon. Almost 150 years ago, the first marathon was held during the Olympic games in Athens.

After proofreading, your essay is ready to be seen by the world.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Proofreading

Fixing grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and formatting errors in an essay or other piece of writing.



#### SUMMARY

In this tutorial, you learned that after you finish drafting your essay, the **final stages of the writing process** are revising, editing, and proofreading. While these three steps may sound the same, they

each have a separate purpose.

The **purpose of revision** is to think about the big picture of your arguments by assessing your overall argumentation, support, evidence, and assertions.

The **purpose of editing** is to look at how your ideas are expressed in language by evaluating whether your words are working the way you intend.

Finally, the **purpose of proofreading** is to make sure everything is clean and correct by focusing on small details of grammar and mechanics. Once you've completed these steps, your essay is ready for your readers.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Martina Shabram.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Editing

Improving the sentences, word choices, and overall style of an essay or other piece of writing.

### Proofreading

Fixing grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and formatting errors in an essay or other piece of writing.

### Revision

The process of re-visioning an essay or other writing project.