# Strategies for Revising, Editing, and Proofreading

There are three overall phases in creating a text:

* **Revising**: Making changes in a document's focus, organization, content (including amount and quality of evidence), and other major aspects. In addition to these global issues, revising includes examining for transitions, coherence of paragraphs, wordiness, lack of clarity...
* **Editing**: making changes at the paragraph and sentence level. Look for the twenty most frequent errors, for correct citation format, correct punctuation of quotations.
* **Proofreading**: Following revising and editing, proofreading means reading through a hard copy of the document to find typos and small errors that have been missed earlier.

## Revising

Revising requires you to think like a reader. Readers need to begin with a sense of the whole and the structure they can expect. When the writer makes promises to the reader, the reader expects them to be fulfilled as the paper unfolds.

### Review the assignment sheet and make sure you have addressed the assignment.

* Make sure that all required parts are included. Not all assignments require that the paper be ordered in the exact order of the assignment, but you should check on that.

### Check organization:

* Identify the **frame** of the document. Is it clear where the introduction ends and the body begins? Can the reader tell within the first page what the argument or thesis of the paper is (not just an announcement of the topic)? Underline the sentence that best expresses the main point of the paper. What **promises** does the introduction make to the reader about the nature of evidence that will be used and the organization of the paper? How could the introductory frame be improved?
* Mark off the main sections of your paper and underline the **signpost sentence** that lets the reader know what that section is about.
* Underline the first several words of each section. These words should tell how the **new section relates to the previous one.**
* Check for **clarity of concepts.** Go through the paper and circle the major concepts that you are presenting. You could also think of them as **keywords.** Then look back at your introduction and thesis statement to see if these concepts are included or predicted. Look at each section to see how the concepts appear there. Have you **defined** all terms the reader might need to know? How do they appear in the conclusion?
* Ask: Is it clear where the body of the paper ends and the conclusion begins? Does the conclusion suggest the **significance of the argument** that has been presented? Does the reader leave knowing the **"So what?"** of this paper? Underline the sentence in the conclusion that best expresses the main point of your paper.
* Go through the paper and for each paragraph, write a brief phrase (three or four words) in the margin that tells what that paragraph does or contains. Then read through the phrases to see what evidence is missing and what could be more effective in a different order. Using post-it notes of these phrases frees the writer from the drafted organization and may lead to more new ideas.

### Revise content:

* Look at the body of your paper to see if you have offered clear, **strong evidence** for your arguments or assertions. Have you used **authoritative sources** or just the ones that were easiest to find on the internet? Have you used your **class's library page** as a portal to finding the best sources? If all you have done is "googled" your topic, your evidence is probably lacking.
* Ask: Where might the reader see **gaps** and need more information or need terms defined? Add that information or definition.

## Strategies for Editing:

### Revise for sentence style and clarity:

* **Read your paper aloud,** listening for sentences that are hard to read or don't sound right. Mark them as you read but keep reading. Don't stop to make changes until you have read the whole paper through out loud.
* **Using the word search tool**, check for over-use of sentences beginning with “There” or “It.” These are called “empty subjects,” and often the sentence will be stronger if it as a real subject— what you are discussing in the sentence.
* Check of **over-use of passive voice.** Passive is appropriate in some writing styles, but you need to have sentence variety for your writing to flow well.
* Check for **over-use of *be* verbs**: is, are, was, were, am, have been, has been, etc. Often a more specific verb will strengthen your sentence.

### Revise for correctness:

* Read through once looking for grammatical and punctuation errors.
* Check the **twenty most frequent errors list.** Based on past comments on your papers, which are you most likely to make? Look those up in the handbook so that you are no longer guessing! The most frequent errors are available on the WIC website [http://wic.oregonstate.edu](http://wic.oregonstate.edu/) under **Grammar Errors and Solutions.**
* Check your **citations.** Make sure you have accurately recorded and correctly presented and punctuated your citations.

## Strategies for Proofreading:

It's true that the best proofreaders are often those with the best skills in grammar and mechanics, but all students can identify some of the mistakes in their documents.

* Remember that the **level of polish of your paper does matter.** Errors and typos detract from your ethos and reputation as a writer and thinker.
* Using **peer review** is always recommended: we all benefit from having more eyes on our writing. Find a friend with a good eye for proofreading, and after you've been through these steps carefully, ask that friend to identify any errors she or he may see.
* **Take a break.** Don't do just one proofread immediately after you've finished the paper and assume that the paper is ready to be turned in. Get away from the paper, relax for a bit, and then come at it with a fresh set of eyes.
* Use the **MS Word spelling and grammar check function as a guide.** Don't assume that you must make a change because you see a red or green line, but don't assume that there is nothing wrong, either. Take a careful look at the underlined error and determine whether or not you need to make a change.
* **Print your paper rather than proofreading on the screen.** This allows you to see your errors easily, and your eyes will appreciate looking at a printed copy after you've strained your vision by staring at an illuminated computer screen for hours. And, use a pen that stands out for you.
* Make proofreading an entirely **separate activity** from other elements of the revision process, like reorganizing paragraphs or double-checking your references.
* **Know your weaknesses**. If you regularly lose points for comma splices in your papers, make an effort to learn what a comma splice is, and read with an eye specifically for that mistake. In fact, it can be very helpful to read a paper looking for one error at a time. (For example, a reading for comma slices, a reading for tense shifts, a reading for missing apostrophes, etc.)
* **Read your paper aloud, slowly.** This, of course, implies that you should give yourself time to proofread effectively. Finishing a paper at the last second is not only stressful, but it leads to errors on the final draft.

## The "Change Five Things" Strategy

When you have brought your draft to class, the teacher may ask you to read through your paper and change five things that will make the paper better. You may be asked to change five things about the introduction, or five things that will improve sentence clarity, or improve five transitional points in the paper.

As a writer, you can also use the "change five things" strategy on your own. If you feel your introduction is weak, go back to it and challenge yourself to make five changes that will make the introduction stronger, clearer, more complete, more interesting. If you feel your support is lacking, go through and find five places where you could add to or deepen the evidence you have offered. Being aware of your own writing problems, you can use the "change five things" strategy to improve all your writing.

Handout developed by the Oregon State University Writing Intensive Curriculum Program.

Some of these strategies are adapted from Wayne Booth et al., *The Craft of Research*, 2nd edition. Chicago University Press, 2003.