17 Revising

This chapter covers the efficient multi-pass process of revising a document, in which different aspects are revised at each pass.

Before You Revise

Allow Plenty of Time for Rewriting

The final stages of the writing process – revising, retyping or rewriting, inserting illustrations etc. – always take much, *much* longer than expected. Allow ample time for them in your planning schedule; otherwise, you'll find yourself having to submit an early draft.

Avoid 'Memory Reading'

After writing something, most people become blind to what they have written. When you have read the document a number of times, you become too familiar with the text. You will tend to read from memory and miss some of the mistakes. There are two ways of overcoming this:

- **Ask someone else to read it.**
- **Stand back from it for as long as possible**. Most undergraduates don't have the time; however, try to put it aside for as long as you can. Even half an hour helps; a day or more is much better. Mistakes of organisation and style then leap out at you.

Multi-Pass Revising

Advice on how to edit efficiently says that you will need to edit at different levels by making several passes through the document, looking at only certain aspects in each pass. This sounds very time-consuming, but it's been shown to take less time – and to be more effective – than trying to do it all in one pass.

However, books suggest two different schemes: one scheme goes from overall organisation to the minute details; the other scheme recommends the reverse. Choose the one you prefer!

Level	Scheme 1	Scheme 2
	Going from details to overall organisation	*Going from overall organisation to details*
Level 1	• Style • Spelling, typos • Grammar • Punctuation	• Overall organisation
Level 2	• Paragraph and sentence length and structure • Verbiage (too many words) • Precise word choice	• Style • Spelling, typos • Grammar • Punctuation
Level 3	• Overall organisation • Format • Appearance	• Formatting
Level 4	Document integrity; matching of the following: • Section numbers to Contents Page • Page numbers in text and Contents Page • Text references and figure numbers	

Note: By using word-processing software in Outline mode and the cross-referencing functions, the stages involving overall organisation and document integrity are made very much easier (see page 11 for brief information on Outline mode). These functions will produce an automatic *Table of Contents* and correlate figure numbers with text references.

Aspects to Check: Organisation, Style, Formatting, Document Integrity

Organisation

Examine your assignment critically in an *overall* way. Look only for errors of organisation.

a. Have you followed your plan?
b. Is the structure logical?
c. Should this section come before that one, that paragraph before this one?
d. Is the information coherent?

Style, Grammar, Sentence and Paragraph Length, Punctuation

At this stage, polish up details of style. For help, see Chapter 18: *Problems of Style*, page 207.

Paragraphs
- • Are the breaks between the paragraphs logical?

Sentences
- • Are you writing in 'real' sentences?
- • Are your sentences too long?
- • Are they bitty? Do they need linking?

Verbs
- • Are you using the distorted passive or other lifeless verbs?
- • Are you using the right tense?
- • Is there subject–verb agreement?

Words
- • Have you spellchecked?
- • Are you using pompous words where short ones would be better?
- • Are you using jargon or clichés?
- • Are you using *I* or *We* too often?
- • Is your language gender-neutral?
- • Are there colloquialisms or contractions?
- • Are you using the right word? (*affect/effect, led/lead, lose/loose, etc.*)
- • Are you writing numbers correctly? (*Ten or 10?*)

Punctuation

- • Are your commas and full stops effective?
- • Are the apostrophes used correctly?

Formatting

If you are writing a journal paper, make sure you follow the journal's *Instructions to Authors*, which will give full formatting instructions.

If you are writing any type of document other than a journal paper: Here are guidelines for fonts, paragraph formatting, justification, packing density of the text and page breaks.

An assignment should be visually strong, not dauntingly dull looking. But make sure that each formatting decision you make is for a good reason. If you just play with it, you'll end up with a document that looks disordered.

If you are word processing your document, you have many options:

a. **Fonts.** Use only the plain fonts; your reader will strongly dislike the more elaborate fonts. One font per document looks professional: either a plain serif or a plain sans serif. Use a maximum of two in one document; a plain serif font for the text and a plain sans serif for headings can look good. Too many different fonts look messy.

b. **Paragraphs.** There are two methods for formatting the first line of a paragraph:
   1. To leave a blank space between each paragraph and the next (press *Enter* once)
   2. To indent the first line of each paragraph by no less than five characters

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Common mistake

No space, no indentation (or a slight indentation of only one or two characters). This may make it very difficult to distinguish one paragraph from the next.

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c. Justification of the text. Justified right-hand margins can make a document look professionally tidy, but there may be problems with the appearance of the spacing between words.

d. Packing density of the text. Information is more readily absorbed if it's not too dense on the page:
- **Wide margins**.
- **Bullet points in the text of reports**. This is a useful method for listing within the text. However, too much use of bullet-pointing can reduce a document to chaos.
- **Indented left-hand margins**, for instance when using bullet points or quotations. However, avoid indenting so many times that the text is squeezed into the right-hand side of the page.

e. The amount of space between lines. Be careful: Your assessor will think you are trying to hide lack of content if the line spacing is too wide and/or the font is too large (larger than 12 point serif).

f. Effective page breaks. Avoid the following bad breaks:

A heading at the bottom of the page (there should be at least two lines of text following a heading)
A short line (a widow) at the top of the page
A table that is cut in two by a page break
A page that ends with a hyphenated word

Document Integrity

If possible, use the word-processing functions that will enable the following automatic functions:

- Numbering of section headings
- Creating a *Table of Contents*
- Cross-referencing of figure and table numbers and their text references
- Cross-referencing your text citations with the sources in your *List of References.*

If you cannot do this, then these common problems may occur, and you will need to manually check whether there are discrepancies in the following:

- The numbering of section headings
- Referring to figures in the text
- Referencing
- The *Table of Contents* and the corresponding page numbers
- The illustrations

Section headings: Is the numbering of each heading and its sub-headings consistent?

Illustrations: Is each illustration:

- Numbered?
- Titled?
- Adequately labelled?
- Correctly referred to in the text?

References: *For each reference:*

- For each text citation, is there the corresponding reference in the *List of References* section? And *vice versa*?
- Does the date of the text citation match the date in the full reference in the *List of References* section?
- Are all the references in the *List of References* section formatted consistently?
- Are all the necessary details there?

Table of Contents (see Chapter 2, *The Core Chapter*, page 23)

- Does the wording of headings match up with the headings in the text?
- Is the numbering of each heading and its sub-headings consistent?
- Is the formatting (indenting) of the Contents page consistent?
- Are the page numbers correct?