Revising for Concision & Clarity

"I have made this letter longer than usual, only because I have not had time to make it shorter."
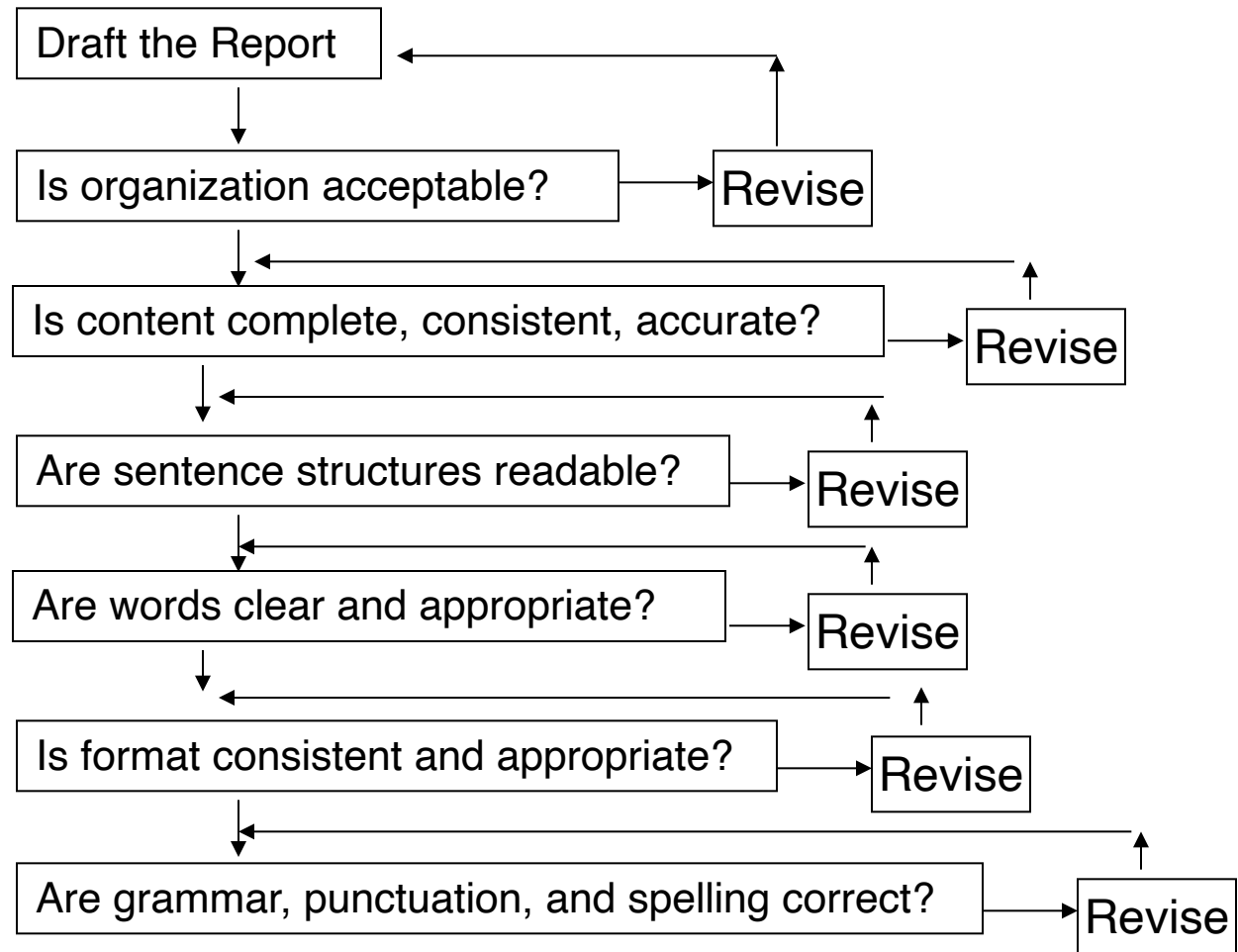
Blaise Pascal
French philosopher and mathematician
(1623-1662)

How to review and revise?

In general:

- Make major changes before minor changes.

- Fix content before form.

- Make lists as you go.

Draft the Report

Is organization acceptable? → Revise

Is content complete, consistent, accurate? → Revise

Are sentence structures readable? → Revise

Are words clear and appropriate? → Revise

Is format consistent and appropriate? → Revise

Are grammar, punctuation, and spelling correct? → Revise

Revise for concision and clarity

Avoid using more words than you need to express an idea

Avoid words with overlapping meanings

Replace phrases that are longer than needed

Keep the subject and verb close together

Balance short and long sentences

Use parallel structure for lists and sentences.

Make referents—this, that, these, those—clear

Prefer action verbs to long noun phrases

Avoid or minimize weak phrases—it is, there are, there is

Avoid slang and figurative language

Avoid using more words than needed

Example that needs revision: Secondly, the second alternative costs less. After a thorough evaluation, we can conclude that the second alternative costs $301,800 less. The second option is also best aesthetically.

Possible revision: *The second alternative costs* $301,800 less and is more visually appealing than the first alternative.

Example that needs revision: We investigated two possible alternatives. They are a three-story and a five-story parking garage.

Possible revision: We investigated *two alternatives:* a three-story and a five-story parking garage.

Avoid words with overlapping meanings

first ~~and foremost~~

final ~~and conclusive~~

each ~~and every~~

issues and concerns (choose one, cut the other)

three ~~different~~ options

~~most~~ unique

~~end~~ result

prioritize ~~in the order of importance~~

Replace phrases that are longer than needed

in the event that =   if

at all times =   always

at this point in time = now

by means of =   by

for the purpose of =   for

due to the fact that = because

Avoid misplaced modifiers

- Misplaced modifier: A descriptor that is placed in a way that confuses rather than clarifies meaning.

- A word or phrase that "modifies" or "describes" another word should be placed so that the relationship between the two is unmistakable.

Examples:

The supervisor spoke to the worker with a harsh voice.
The supervisor spoke with a harsh voice to the worker.

Supervisors can tell only line workers to finish the job.

Supervisors can tell line workers only to finish the job.

Supervisors can tell line workers to finish the job only.

Avoid dangling modifiers

Phrases dangle when they do not clearly or logically refer to the appropriate noun or pronoun.

Example that needs revision: <u>After entering the information, the model</u> calculates and shows the profitability of the stations.

Possible revision: After *the user enters* the information, *the model calculates* and shows the profitability of the stations.

Example that needs revision: <u>On entering the room</u>, the <u>amount of congestion</u> annoyed several customers.

Possible revision: On *entering the room, several customers* were annoyed with the amount of congestion.

Keep subject and verb close together

The information that begins a sentence establishes the perspective through which the reader views the sentence.

Two principles based on reader expectations:

1. Readers need to connect the subject and the verb to know what the subject is doing.

2. Every sentence should make a single primary point.

Keep subject and verb close together

Example that needs revision: To supplement this strictly data-driven approach with hands-on experience, a <u>dealership</u> that is located in Livonia sells many types of autos, and offers extensive service on them <u>was visited</u> so the team could get a look at the service practices of the business first hand.

Possible revision: To supplement the data with hands-on experience, the *team visited* a dealership in Livonia that sells and services many types of autos.

Balance short and long sentences

Example that needs revision: For the financial model, we obtained historical data on energy usage at the facility and performed significant analysis (18 words). With these data, we were able to establish Walbridge's current expenses and make a financial model (16 words). We researched templates and obtained two proposals demonstrating return on investment for light bulb replacement programs (16 words).Using these materials, the client can develop its own model for return on investment for future customers (17 words).

Possible revision: We obtained and analyzed historical data on energy usage at the facility (12 words). With these data, we established a financial model of the client's current expenses by researching templates and referring to two proposals that demonstrate return on investment for light bulb replacement programs (31 words). The client can use this model to develop its own similar model (11 words).

Use parallel structure for parallel parts of lists and sentences.

Unclear: This solution has high efficiency, low overhead, reliability, and can be easily integrated with existing systems.

Revised: This solution has high efficiency <u>and</u> low overhead, <u>and it is reliable</u> and can be easily integrated with existing systems.

Make referents—this, that, these, those—clear

Unclear: The Young's modulus, averaged over the four data sets, was determined to be 68.70 ±0.25 GPa, and the reference value is 71.70 GPa [1]. <u>This</u> fails to fall within uncertainty of the reference value. **To what does 'this' refer?**

Revised: The Young's modulus, averaged over the four data sets, was determined to be 68.70 ±0.25 GPa, and the reference value is 71.70 GPa [1]. <u>This determined value</u> fails to fall within uncertainty of the reference value.

Prefer action verbs to nominalizations or long noun phrases

Weak and wordy: We ask for the cooperation of all employees.

Strong and concise: We ask that all employees cooperate

Revision saves only 2 words, but multiply that by x-number of sentences.

Avoid or minimize weak phrases—it is, there are, there is

Weak: **<u>There are</u>** four t-joints that rotate about the shaft.

Revised: Four t-joints rotate about the shaft.

Avoid slang and figurative language; consider your potential global audiences

For example: She **brings a lot to the table** in her role as a software engineer.

Make deliberate decision about active vs. passive voice

In active voice, the subject is doing the action.

- Dr. Hunt attended a seminar about kidney disease.

- Torrential rains weakened the dam.

The subject of the sentence is the agent in active voice.

In passive voice, the subject is receiving the action.

- The marathon runner was treated for dehydration by the doctor on duty.

- The machine was activated by the automatic timer.

In passive voice, the performer of the action generally follows the verb instead of preceding it.

Make deliberate decision about active vs. passive voice

Benefits of active voice
- Makes information direct.
- Shortens sentences.
- Can provide more information than passive voice provides.

Benefits of passive voice
- Is useful when the performer of the action is unknown or irrelevant.
- Keeps the personal element out of the message.
- Is useful when the emphasis should be on the receiver of the action.

Example: passive to active voice

Example with passive voice

There have been many complaints <u>by several student groups</u> on North Campus about the shortage of parking spaces. To meet the demand for parking on North Campus, a new parking structure <u>must be built</u>. Therefore, the X-Team <u>was asked</u> to analyze the current situation. There <u>were</u> three parking structure alternatives <u>considered</u>.

Possible revision with active voice

Several student groups on North Campus have complained about the shortage of parking spaces. To meet the demand for parking on North Campus, the university needs to build a new parking structure. Therefore, the X-Team will analyze the current situation and consider three parking structure alternatives.

The next few slides show example sentences that need revisions

1. From the process map, it is clear that the plant has strayed from its primary task of the production of standard ink concentrates to producing inks that are customized as well.

2. To determine the optimum labor allocation, we will perform time and motion studies of each and every task and subtask. **This will** help us to determine the best work-time to break-time distribution that will keep employee fatigue to a minimum while optimizing the plant's productivity.

3. With these analyses, we will **be able to** implement the development of appropriate recommendations to eliminate the problem of the workers having too much downtime.

4. In resolving this issue, the workers' utilization would be higher and the more efficient paint department could better supply its 12 in-house departments. **This** is a hot topic for the department as the VP is concerned about this issue.

5. Over the next 6 years, there will be a great deal of change within the clinic due to the fact that the new children's and women's hospital will have its construction complete in 6 years.

6. From our conclusions, our group will **make recommendations** as to whether more rooms are needed to accommodate the flow of patients in and out of the division, and what measures can be taken to optimize the usage of the current rooms.