



Revision: Tips and Strategies

As one Oxy writing professor says often, “everything happens in revision.” Yet many beginning writers refuse to rewrite or revise, or do not build enough time into their writing process to allow for a complete draft-revision sequence. We often resist and even resent suggestions to revise, taking the suggestion or requirement to rewrite as a personal affront, an insult that the work we presented the first time is not “good” enough. However, as nearly every professional, published, or more experienced writer will tell you: all writing is rewriting. Writing we most admire or enjoy has certainly gone through much revision before we’ve seen it. Revising takes time and effort and doing so will inevitably help you become a more confident, effective, and stronger writer. Consider the below tips and strategies to help you with the revision process.

1. **Answer the reader’s questions.** Questions will emerge through draft conferences or peer reviews. You should spend time answering these questions, and anticipating other questions your reader might have about your paper. You need to listen to the larger conversation about your paper rather than only paying attention to your part of this discussion.

2. **Outline your paper after drafting.** One exercise that can be helpful as you revise is the “Reverse Outline” - see WC Resources for this document.

3. **Consider redesigning your structure.** Write down the main points you want your reader to know when they finish your paper. Then, go through your essay and color-code where you see each of these points. You will need to “group” the points together: all claims about point “A” should be together in one place in your paper (and so on for each main point). Once you have regrouped your points, consider the logical sequence the reader needs to understand each point you make.

4. **Make decisions about what to keep in and what to leave out.** What parts of the paper help move your meaning and thesis forward? Cut out anything that does not seem explicitly connected to this main idea. Most of us write a first draft that skims over the surface of our topic, which is appropriate because we are searching for our focus in this early stage. After you complete a draft and receive feedback (from peers, your professor, or in the Writing Center), you should have more information about your focus and the meaning you are trying to convey. Do not be afraid to jettison unimportant or unrelated parts of your paper.

5. **Go back to your sources.** You may need to re-read primary and secondary material to select stronger quotes or other evidence for your newly redesigned essay. You may need to change *how* you are using your sources, and/or *what* specific material you use from them.

6. **Spend time repairing sentence-level concerns and fixing errors.** Run a grammar and spell check through a word processing system. This is not an ideal “fix it” program, but it is a good starting point. Have someone else read your paper and underline or highlight any typos, grammatical errors, or stylistic inconsistencies.