

# quicks tips

## REVISION CHECKLIST (for thesis-driven papers)

The process of writing your first draft often helps you figure out your thesis and develop your most important ideas. Many writers are reluctant to revise and reorganize their writing because they've already put so much time into the first draft, or because they don't think they can—or should—improve on what they've already written. However, just as effective reading involves rereading, effective writing involves rewriting. Revision also means *much* more than just proofreading for mechanical errors. Revision is important work that can require making difficult choices in order to clarify and strengthen your writing and ideas. While it may seem easiest simply to review the paper yourself, it can often be difficult to distance yourself from your own writing. For this reason, having someone else read and critique your work is crucial to getting a true outsider's point of view and can alert you to previously unnoticed questions and problems. The following is a list of questions to consider when you are revising a paper:

### **DOES THE PAPER FULFILL THE ASSIGNMENT AND INSTRUCTOR EXPECTATIONS?**

Before you put any more time and effort into your draft, it is important to make sure that what you are writing fits with your instructor's expectations. Look back at your assignment, as well as any grading criteria or rubric you have, and/or consult with your instructor to confirm that you're on the right track; it can be very frustrating to complete a second or third draft and then find out that you need to start over. If appropriate, you should also reread the instructor's comments on previous papers to ensure that your revision is meeting your instructor's expectations.

### **IS THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF YOUR PAPER CLEAR AND LOGICAL?**

Don't be afraid to reorganize the order of your ideas after you've written an initial draft, or even to modify your thesis in light of how your writing has developed. Because your ideas may change and deepen as you write, and because new ideas may emerge, you may need to reconsider which points deserve more attention and how these points now relate to each other. Read your paper as carefully and critically as you would any other author's. Overall, check that you present a clear and effective introduction, an accurate thesis statement, a sequence of body paragraphs that present main ideas that directly support that thesis, and a conclusion.

### **DO YOU SUPPORT YOUR IDEAS OR ARGUMENTS WITH SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE?**

Keeping your audience, genre, and discipline in mind, make sure that evidence and other support is provided where appropriate. Look for ideas that are not supported or fully developed or explained. Adequate support is central to a credible claim, and credible sources are likewise central to providing solid support and development for your ideas. This may require that you revisit or reconsider your notes and researched sources, or that you conduct additional research to lend more support to important but underdeveloped ideas.

### **IS EACH PARAGRAPH WELL STRUCTURED?**

Each paragraph should have one main idea, expressed clearly. If you notice your paragraphs have two or three main ideas, consider breaking up such overloaded paragraphs into multiple paragraphs. In addition—and especially if you've reorganized your ideas—check that appropriate transitions between paragraphs are present, and that ideas are not presented more than once without an express purpose.

## **ARE YOUR SENTENCES CLEARLY WRITTEN AND APPROPRIATE TO THE DISCIPLINE OR GENRE?**

As you look at individual sentences, can you clearly identify the subject of the sentence (the actor, whether it be a person, an idea, a process, or something else) and the main verb of the sentence (the action that your subject is taking or the subject's state of being)? Revise to make the subject/actor and verb/action clear to your readers. Work to eliminate any unnecessary words, and to make sure that your language is formal enough for an academic paper (avoid unclear statements, and make deliberate choices about your use of slang and conversational language). Finally, make sure that you have defined (directly or by illustration or discussion) any new or technical terminology for your reader.

## **IS YOUR PROSE GRACEFUL AND COMPELLING?**

Consider the interest of the reader and how you're working to maintain it: Do you vary your word choice and sentence length? Do you write in the appropriate voice (active or passive) for your discipline and purpose? Is your language concise? Is your tone persuasive and convincing?

## **ARE YOUR SOURCES (IF ANY) ALL APPROPRIATELY INTEGRATED AND CITED?**

Check that your sources are integrated into your writing correctly and appropriately. Consult an appropriate style guide to complete your citations and Works Cited or References pages correctly, and make sure all sources are appropriately noted and accounted for. (See the appropriate quicktip for your discipline's documentation style.) Automatic generators can be useful tools for getting started, but they often contain errors, so be sure to check these citations against style guides.

## **HAVE YOU CAREFULLY EDITED AND PROOFREAD YOUR PAPER?**

Editing and proofreading for language usage (grammar) and punctuation are essential aspects of effective writing. However, they are the later steps in the ongoing process of brainstorming, planning, drafting, and revising. Rushing or ignoring any of these earlier steps can lead to a paper that is unclear, underdeveloped, and very difficult to revise in the late stages of the writing process. (For more details and strategies, consult the Center for Writing's quicktip on Editing and Proofreading Strategies.)

- Leave yourself plenty of time for all steps of the writing process, including editing.
- Use resources available to you: dictionaries, thesauruses, handbooks, citation guides, handouts from class, librarians, and, of course, **writing center consultants**.
- Keep a list of errors you tend to make and read the paper once for each error type
- Read your paper aloud to see if you can "hear" any errors or awkward sentences.
- Try reading your paper backwards, sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph, so that you are focusing on the text, not the ideas.
- Lay your paper aside for a day or so before proofreading and editing. You may have an easier time editing and proofreading if your writing isn't so "fresh" in your mind.
- Be sure to proofread your citations, especially if you've used a citation generator.
- **DON'T RELY SOLELY ON COMPUTER HELP!** Spell-check and grammar-check tools are useful, but they do not constitute or substitute for proofreading.

*Adapted from The University of Minnesota's Student Writing Guide (2004, pp. 9–11), and from The College of Education and Human Development Writing Center's handout, "Editing and Proofreading Strategies."*