Revising and Editing
Understanding the Purpose of Revising and Editing

Revising and editing allow you to examine two important aspects of your writing separately, so that you can give each task your undivided attention.

- When you revise, you take a second look at your ideas. You might add, cut, move, or change information in order to make your ideas clearer, more accurate, more interesting, or more convincing.
- When you edit, you take a second look at how you expressed your ideas. You add or change words. You fix any problems in grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. You improve your writing style. You make your essay into a polished, mature piece of writing, the end product of your best efforts.
Tip:

How do you get the best out of your revisions and editing? Here are some strategies that writers have developed to look at their first drafts from a fresh perspective. Try them throughout this course; then keep using the ones that bring results.

- Take a break. You are proud of what you wrote, but you might be too close to it to make changes. Set aside your writing for a few hours or even a day until you can look at it objectively.
- Ask someone you trust for feedback and constructive criticism.
- Pretend you are one of your readers. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied? Why?
- Use the resources that your college provides. Find out where your school’s writing lab is located and ask about the assistance they provide online and in person.
Creating Unity and Coherence

Following your outline closely offers you a reasonable guarantee that your writing will stay on purpose and not drift away from the controlling idea. However, when writers are rushed, are tired, or cannot find the right words, their writing may become less than they want it to be. Their writing may no longer be clear and concise, and they may be adding information that is not needed to develop the main idea.

When a piece of writing has unity, all the ideas in each paragraph and in the entire essay clearly belong and are arranged in an order that makes logical sense. When the writing has coherence, the ideas flow smoothly. The wording clearly indicates how one idea leads to another within a paragraph and from paragraph to paragraph.
Tip

- Reading your writing aloud will often help you find problems with unity and coherence. Listen for the clarity and flow of your ideas. Identify places where you find yourself confused, and write a note to yourself about possible fixes.

- When you reread your writing to find revisions to make, look for each type of problem in a separate sweep. Read it straight through once to locate any problems with unity. Read it straight through a second time to find problems with coherence. You may follow this same practice during many stages of the writing process.
Creating Coherence

Careful writers use transitions to clarify how the ideas in their sentences and paragraphs are related. These words and phrases help the writing flow smoothly. Adding transitions is not the only way to improve coherence, but they are often useful and give a mature feel to your essays. Transitional worksheet “Common Transitional Words and Phrases” groups many common transitions according to their purpose.
Being Clear and Concise and Identifying Wordiness

Sometimes writers use too many words when fewer words will appeal more to their audience and better fit their purpose. Here are some common examples of wordiness to look for in your draft. Eliminating wordiness helps all readers, because it makes your ideas clear, direct, and straightforward.

- **Sentences that begin with** *There is* or *There are*
  - *Wordy:* There are two major experiments that the Biology Department sponsors. **Revised:** The Biology Department sponsors two major experiments.

- **Sentences with unnecessary modifiers.** *Wordy:* Two extremely famous and well-known consumer advocates spoke eloquently in favor of the proposed important legislation. **Revised:** Two well-known consumer advocates spoke in favor of the proposed legislation.
More examples of identifying Wordiness...

**Sentences with deadwood phrases that add little to the meaning.** Be judicious when you use phrases such as in terms of, with a mind to, on the subject of, as to whether or not, more or less, as far as...is concerned, and similar expressions. You can usually find a more straightforward way to state your point. **Wordy:** As a world leader in the field of green technology, the company plans to focus its efforts in the area of geothermal energy. A report as to whether or not to use geysers as an energy source is in the process of preparation. **Revised:** As a world leader in green technology, the company plans to focus on geothermal energy. A report about using geysers as an energy source is in preparation.

**Sentences in the passive voice or with forms of the verb to be.** Sentences with passive-voice verbs often create confusion, because the subject of the sentence does not perform an action. Sentences are clearer when the subject of the sentence performs the action and is followed by a strong verb. Use strong active-voice verbs in place of forms of to be, which can lead to wordiness. Avoid passive voice when you can. **Wordy:** It might perhaps be said that using a GPS device is something that is a benefit to drivers who have a poor sense of direction. **Revised:** Using a GPS device benefits drivers who have a poor sense of direction.
Choosing Specific Appropriate Words

- **Avoid clichés.** Overused expressions such as *green with envy, face the music, better late than never*, and similar expressions are empty of meaning and may not appeal to your audience.

- **Be careful when you use words that sound alike but have different meanings.** Some examples are *allusion/illusion, complement/compliment, council/counsel, concurrent/consecutive, founder/flounder, and historic/historical.* When in doubt, check a dictionary.

- **Choose words with the connotations you want.** Choosing a word for its connotations is as important in formal essay writing as it is in all kinds of writing. Compare the positive connotations of the word *proud* and the negative connotations of *arrogant* and *conceited.*

- **Use specific words rather than overly general words.** Find synonyms for *thing, people, nice, good, bad, interesting,* and other vague words. Or use specific details to make your exact meaning clear.
Tip

Editing often takes time. Budgeting time into the writing process allows you to complete additional edits after revising. Editing and proofreading your writing helps you create a finished work that represents your best efforts.

Here are a few more tips to remember about your readers:

- Readers do not notice correct spelling, but they do notice misspellings.
- Readers look past your sentences to get to your ideas—unless the sentences are awkward, poorly constructed, and frustrating to read.
- Readers notice when every sentence has the same rhythm as every other sentence, with no variety.
- Readers do not cheer when you use *there*, *their*, and *they’re* correctly, but they notice when you do not.
- Readers will notice the care with which you handled your assignment and your attention to detail in the delivery of an error-free document.