

## The Writing Process: Drafting, Revising, and Editing

What do we mean by the writing process? When you sit down to write – whether a letter, an essay, or a short story – you go through a series of steps that involves brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing. Every writer has a unique writing process so that there is no one single approach to producing a text but multiple ways in which a writer may arrive at the final product. You may or may not go through all of these steps in this order, but more than likely you will repeat some or all of them as you generate new ideas, modify your thesis, or reorganize your paragraphs. Knowing and putting into practice the different steps of the writing process will help you produce well-written, effective texts that clearly communicate your intended message to your reader.

The chapters in this section will introduce you to the components of the writing process and help you as you begin to write college-level essays.

- **Drafting:** While you may think that you don't need to take a writing class, this chapter addresses the benefits of freshman composition and what you can expect and what your instructor will expect from you. You will also learn the parts of the rhetorical triangle and how to use them to produce effective writing as well as brainstorming techniques through which you can discover an interesting topic and begin drafting.
- **Revising:** In this chapter you will learn what it means to revise, why revision is important, and how to go about revising the content, organization, and style of your writing based on a specific purpose, audience, and occasion. You will also learn practical revision methods that you can employ when writing timed, in-class essays as well as out-of-class assignments.
- **Editing:** This chapter begins by answering the questions “Why edit?” and “When should you edit?” It also provides tips for effectively editing your own writing including helping you identify and address specific problem areas.

You will notice that this section separates revision and editing into two distinct steps. While revision focuses on global issues – content, organization, and style, editing involves an examination of local issues – grammar, punctuation, spelling, and formatting. You will benefit from revising and editing separately as these chapters will illustrate.

At the end of the Revision and Editing chapters, you will find resources that your instructor may have you use to assist your peers in revising and editing their writing and which you may employ on your own, as well as a chart that you can use to keep track of the most frequent errors in your own writing.

## Drafting

### WHY TAKE ANOTHER WRITING CLASS?

“But I know how to write,” you might be thinking. Certainly, to have made it this far in your academic career, you do. Starting with kindergarten, formal education pivots around writing skills and their near academic cousin, reading. In layer after layer, starting first with the basics of letter names and shapes, through primary sentence patterns and elementary paragraphs, you have learned the components of writing.

It would be easy to insert in this text a list of jobs that require numerous writing tasks. However, as a student, especially as a freshman who is possibly still undecided in your choice of major, remember...

Life is easier for those who can write well.

Even before your first words, you used language to express needs, wants, and opinions. As you enter larger and larger societies beyond your primary family relationships, communication increasingly requires written language instead of spoken words. The more important the information to be communicated is the more likely the need to write it down. Writing with precision and clarity allows accurate communication of your views, feelings, desires, and voice. Often the only way to claim a right, protest an injustice, or persuade others is through writing. Learning to do it well will help you.

Consider the following tasks:

- a cover letter and resume
- an accident or police report
- a request for a transfer or raise
- a note to a child’s teacher
- directions on an invitation
- a memo to your boss and co-workers
- a newspaper ad

All of these commonplace forms of communication are more effective when well-written.

Yet there is still another reason for learning to write well. At the most practical level, instructors expect you to write proficiently, and learning to write well will generate better grades in freshman English courses as well as in all other college level courses.

### WRITING EXPECTATIONS

#### Instructor Expectations

When you arrive in your first college English class, you have already successfully progressed through many stages of writing instruction. You have met the expectations of your high school classes and in many cases excelled. However, you might have been told *always* to write five paragraphs, *always* to write a thesis that lists three points, and *always* to write a conclusion that restates the thesis. As remnants of these expectations remain in all English assignments, it is natural to think you can keep doing what worked in your past English courses and get the same return for your investment—that is, *the same grade*. Although several similarities exist between all writing assignments, in some areas the expectations for your writing increase significantly when you enter a freshman composition class.

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For many students the greatest concern is an increase in the length requirement for an essay. The second change in expectation is in the depth of thought reflected in your writing. Stating the obvious in a grammatically correct manner no longer will achieve an excellent or possibly even a passing grade. Not surprisingly, these longer, more in depth essays require greater time investment for writing, revising, and editing, an investment your instructor expects you to make.

### Your Expectations

Not only will the requirements for the class assignments be different, but the level of help you can expect from your instructor and other students will be different as well. You can expect more individual time from your instructor. Part of the instructor's teaching assignment is to hold regular office hours. Take advantage of the greater availability and the regular office hours of your instructor. Make an appointment to discuss your assignments, your thesis choices, or any topic that will help you either during scheduled office hours or at a time mutually agreeable to you both. Then keep the appointment.

You can expect membership in a community of writers made up of your instructor, your classmates, and yourself. Every member of this community is involved in your writing process whether through class discussions, peer reviews, instructor comments on papers or through office visits. You will also be a valuable member of this community through your own writing, participation in class discussions, and giving feedback to other classmates on their drafts and essays.

You can expect that although a good attitude and enthusiasm will help you learn any skill, these two attributes will neither create passing grades on essays, nor will they following a prescribed format (like the five paragraph theme). Having perfect attendance will not guarantee you a passing grade for your course. It is possible to attend every class, turn in every assignment, and still fail; succeeding in freshman composition will require work and thoughtful involvement in the writing process.

## USING THE RHETORICAL TRIANGLE

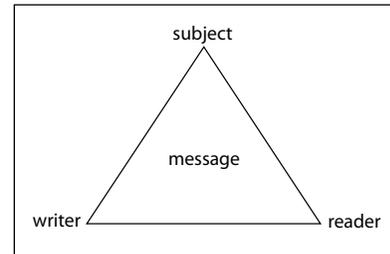
Though the classroom setting allows a community to aid in many stages of the writing process, freshman composition courses require one author to submit one essay for each assignment. After all the preliminary steps of investigation and analysis, when you sit down in front of a blank computer screen or piece of paper, it may seem like the focus is all on you. In a sense it is because it is your assignment. However, there are actually *three* other very important parties involved in the writing process: your **subject**, your **reader**, and the ultimate **message** you want that reader to receive. Taken together with the **writer**, these elements comprise the rhetorical triangle.

### Subject

If you have chosen your own topic, it is likely that you have some interest in the subject of your essay. Many instructors draw from years of experience in working with freshman writers to assign a topic with the most potential for a majority of interesting and satisfactory essays from a class. So what can you do if you are assigned a subject that doesn't interest you? Think through why it doesn't interest you. Do you think it's unimportant? What is a related topic or issue that is more important? Could you incorporate the topic you see as more important into a discussion of the original assigned topic? Come up with an angle that interests you and talk to your instructor about it.

It may be that your topic is engaging and interesting. Still, do some thinking, and take notes. Grab a sheet of paper, and write down your initial and subsequent thoughts on your topic. No thought is

too small or too large to consider at this stage although you will generate many thoughts that may never make it into your paper. Just keep thinking and recording until you determine the angle from which you want to approach your topic. For example, if your class is writing about pets, you could craft an essay around one of several issues pertinent to pet ownership: cost, companionship, risk, inconvenience, health benefits, breeding, laws governing licensing, or professional show careers.



Once you have determined the approach you will take and the basic statement you want to make about it (for example, “The health benefits of pet ownership outweigh the cost and inconvenience.”) you can begin narrowing the information you will present about the subject. It is impossible to include in an essay everything you know about a subject, so begin thinking about what your reader needs to know to understand your position.

### **Reader**

Though not physically present, the reader is very powerful in all stages of the writing process. Next to the subject of the essay, your reader determines more about your writing than any other factor in the essay process. At first, it might seem strange to say a reader has this much influence on what you write, but if you remember that writing is just sophisticated communication, you will realize audience always has a large impact on what people say. Think about an exciting evening you experienced in high school while you were still under your parents’ or guardians’ authority. Think about how you would relate the events of that evening to your parents. Now think about how you would relate those same experiences to a group of peers. The differences in the two versions of your story are caused by choices you make as a writer based on what you want each audience to understand about the evening. When you consider it this way, the power of the audience is great indeed.

However, this powerful reader is also somewhat lazy. Most readers do not want to figure out your meaning or puzzle out your thesis. Readers want a well-presented, interesting exposition of your subject. A well-written essay leaves no gaps for the reader to fill in, no ambiguities for the reader to interpret. Think of your reader as a demanding but interested party to every stage of the writing process by trying to anticipate reader’s questions and concerns as you write.

### **Writer**

With an assigned subject to write about and a critical reader to write to, the writer might now appear to be the least significant member of the rhetorical triangle. However, it is the writer who makes meaning through choices. It is the writer who tells the reader what is most important about the topic. The writer’s thesis statement, supported by reasoning and examples, informs the reader’s understanding of the subject. By following the rules of written English, logically organizing the sentences and paragraphs within the essay, and summing up the main argument in a succinct but clear conclusion, the writer can achieve communication of his or her intended message. The reader, presented with clear unity, now can agree with you or, if not agree, at least understand your point of view.

### **Message**

The interaction of the writer, subject and reader create the message. When you have the skill to communicate your point about a given subject, correctly anticipating reader objections and biases, your choices as a writer determine meaning.

## COMPONENTS OF WRITING

When you look at a page in a book, you generally see words strung together to form sentences. The sentences merge into paragraphs, and the paragraphs become essays or chapters. A great emphasis is often put on the form of words, their spelling and usage; however, without a worthwhile idea behind the words, in all their correctness, they are meaningless. Ideas, not words, are the components of writing, regardless of the emphasis in an English class on word count. Words represent and communicate ideas, but the ideas must come first. Perhaps you got an inkling of this distinction prior to your first college English class. If a teacher ever gave you two grades on the same essay, one was probably for correctness (getting the words right and joining them together properly), and the other was likely for content (the ideas behind the words). In English 1010 and 1020, incorrect word usage can sabotage good ideas, but correctness alone cannot carry a paper that has no significant thesis and its required support.

So, with all the concern over word count and correctness, how do you focus on the ideas that will make up your paper? How do you generate those ideas? Brainstorming is an excellent way to begin. Even an in-class essay will benefit from the most simple of brainstorming exercises, and an out-of-class assignment will give you time to use several techniques to develop ideas for your paper. Whichever type you use, all brainstorming originates in thinking and progresses to capturing thoughts on paper long enough to pursue them in your essay.

## A GLOSSARY OF BRAINSTORMING TECHNIQUES

- Freewriting:** writing continuously on a topic for a set period of time without concern for correctness or accuracy
- Looping:** a series of freewriting activities in which an idea from the previous freewriting sample generates an idea for the beginning of the next freewriting session
- Journaling:** similar to freewriting, journaling is assigned writing on a set topic with a word length requirement rather than a set time period but with no emphasis on correctness
- Clustering or Mapping:** jotting down topic ideas or supporting points and then circling them to organize them into clusters; or working backwards, starting with empty circles then filling them in
- Cubing:** approaching the topic from six angles including description, comparison/contrast, free association of the subject with other words or topics, analysis, importance, or use
- Listing:** a basic starting point in any idea generating activity that consists of writing down words or phrases as they occur to you in no particular order
- Interviewing and Discussing:** talking an idea over with someone else, either an “expert” in the case of interviewing, or a member of your writing community
- Questioning:** similar to interviewing and discussing, the writer both asks and answers the questions he or she generates about the topic
- Outlining:** formal or informal listing of sentences or phrases that communicate points concerning the topic; works well when thesis statement and topic sentences are determined and supporting paragraphs need to be fleshed out

## ESSAY ORGANIZATION

Once you have gathered the ideas that you want to include in your essay, it is time to begin arranging them in some sort of order. It would be nice to have a formula to follow in writing an

essay with clearly delineated steps that neatly lead in order to a finished product. However, most good writing is circular. As you link ideas to each other to form the first draft of your paper, you may realize you need more information. As a writer, you have the option of returning to brainstorming for more ideas to include in your essay. Armed with these new thoughts, you can modify the thesis if necessary, write some more, and repeat the process as many times as necessary at any point in your essay.

Once you have an adequate number of ideas to use in your essay, the next concern should be to organize those ideas effectively. Generally, an essay has an **introduction** containing the **thesis**, several **body** paragraphs linked with **transitions**, and a **conclusion**. Specific goals like the ones listed below can help you develop each section of your essay:

- To have a general introduction that attracts reader’s interest
- To make a statement (your thesis) in the first paragraph about the topic that you intend to prove, explain, or explore in the essay
- To stay on topic, leaving unrelated or confusing material for another essay
- To show the link between your ideas and examples (transitions)
- To give several examples to support each part of the thesis (You can always cut them out later if you have too many.)
- To use the last paragraph of the essay to focus the reader’s attention (again) on the main point you have tried to make
- To anticipate readers’ thoughts as much as possible so that you can answer in your essay any objections or questions they might have

## THE CIRCLE OF WRITING

Eventually, through drafting, repeated brainstorming, and continued thinking, you will be satisfied enough with your essay to turn it in by the due date. Or perhaps, you will turn it in to meet a due date although you are dissatisfied with some portion of it. Though your paper has the necessary introduction, body, and conclusion and has been through peer reviews and your own revision and editing (both of which are covered in the next two chapters), you might feel as if you aren’t finished with it. This is common. In fact, often a writer doesn’t “finish” an essay. Many writers feel as if they merely pause in their exploration of an issue because it is time to turn in the final version of their papers. Although an essay should never be “reused” for another class, if you are still interested in your subject, it is possible that you will be able to return to the same topic at a later date to continue writing and discovering meaning for yourself and potential readers in another class assignment or for pleasure.

Regardless of how you feel when you submit your essay to be graded, always return to it later for knowledge of your strengths and awareness of your weaknesses as a writer. These insights can be invaluable the next time you write and can help continue the upward spiral of skill you are achieving.

## Revising

### “REVISE! REVISE! REVISE!”

You have heard it repeatedly. Many of you have seen it written in the margins of your graded papers. “Revise! Revise! Revise!” But let’s be honest; do we take the advice? Do you know what your instructors mean when they deliver this mantra? Most importantly, how do you revise? This chapter explains revision and provides specific suggestions to help you get started.

*Revising* means reading and changing with the aim of “improving or correcting.” Revising does not mean that you have failed with the first draft or that you can simply spell-check and call it complete. Revision does not mean editing. Revising is one part of the writing process; editing is another. Though you may be tempted to approach these tasks simultaneously, rarely is this a good decision. As such, we will confine the discussion in this chapter to revision and address the issues of editing in the next chapter of this section.

### FOCUS ON . . .

When you embark on revising, you focus your attention on the global characteristics or larger issues of writing—**content**, **organization**, and **style**. Because these issues are common to all types of writing, good revision skills have widespread benefits, whether taking a history exam, writing a thesis, advertising for a personal assistant, or crafting the next great American novel. In addition to being one of the most creative parts of the writing process, examining the content, organization, and style of your writing allows you to examine your audience as well as your approach, your substance as well as your style, your writing as well as your thinking. Obviously then, revising is extremely important, so before you address techniques for revising your writing, let’s take a moment to clarify the specifics.

#### Content

When you talk about *content*, you may be referring to the overall theme of your writing, the individual points made within your writing, or the separate features of your writing (text, lists, graphics, etc.). Likewise, when you revise *content*, you should do so at all levels, starting with the larger overall content and working with smaller and smaller portions until you have considered all the features of your written material.

#### Organization

Like content, *organization*—the arrangement of your writing—may refer to the entire work or specific parts such as paragraphs or even sentences. Furthermore, just as when you revise for content, you start with the overall picture. When you consider revising your organization, it is best to start big by thinking about paragraph placement and sentence arrangement.

#### Style

Many of you may be most comfortable wearing jeans and t-shirts, but you would never wear such casual clothing to an employment interview at the local bank. Just as you alter your style of dress depending on the situation, purpose, audience, and occasion should also guide the revision of your writing style. You are all familiar with the adage, “It’s not what you say but how you say it”; in writing, this is known as style. Your use of language often determines the style of your writing, but how you approach a topic, how you present your ideas, and the tone you adopt also affect your writing style.

## REVISION & RHETORICAL CONTEXT

Whether telling a story, making an argument, or simply conveying information, you rarely write without a specific **purpose**, **audience**, or **occasion**. These circumstances make up what you refer to as rhetorical context and guide much of your revision.

### Purpose

The expected accomplishment or goal of your writing is your writing *purpose*.

Whether writing a letter to a prospective employer, placing an advertisement in the classifieds, or crafting a jingle for a new breakfast cereal, your writing purpose influences your content, organization, and style. For example, your letter of introduction would be formal yet personable while your classified ad would be informative yet succinct.

Assigned writings may prescribe a specific purpose, for instance, “explain a process with which you are familiar,” or may impose multiple purposes, such as, “identify a problem and propose a solution.” Regardless, your purpose should guide your writing and must guide your revision.

### Audience

Those persons you hope or expect will read your writing are the *audience*. While audience may refer to a single person, a group of people, or an institution such as the government, individuals read written material.

When crafting an assigned writing, you may be instructed to write to a specific audience or to an audience of your own choosing. Either way, audience determines much of your content, organization, and style, so it helps to keep your audience in mind throughout the writing and revising process. Additionally, you know at least one person who will read your writing is your instructor, a fact that should inform but not control your writing. For example, if you know your instructor dislikes the use of slang, you should revise your language accordingly.

### Occasion

While purpose refers to what your writing aims to achieve, occasion describes your motivation, situation, or reason for writing. After waiting twenty minutes for the shuttle bus to campus, for instance, you may write a letter to the university detailing a need for additional campus shuttles. Your writing purpose would be additional shuttles, but your writing occasion might be arriving late for freshman writing class because you were waiting for a shuttle. While your purpose and audience should guide your writing and revision, the writing occasion always affects your writing. This effect may be either positive or negative but should never be overlooked.

You have read content, organization, style, purpose, audience, and occasion, but you have yet to start revising. At this point, you may be thinking, “Hey, this is getting complicated!” Take heart. Now that you know what you need to focus on and the factors you should consider, it is time to revise.

## REVISE WHAT?

We have talked about the importance of revising and the issues you should address when you revise, but an important question remains. **How do you know what needs revision?** The following tips offer concrete ways for identifying areas that require or might benefit from revision, as well as ways of approaching revision. There are, however, a few important things to keep in mind. You may find that some of the tips offered here do not work for you. Likewise, you may find that a technique that works well for you is not included here. These two extremes underscore one of

the greatest features of writing: choice! You are the writer. As such, the choices are yours, and ultimately, the best revision process is the one that works for you.

### 1. **PRINT what you have written.**

Although you live in a computerized world, using a printed version of your writing for revision enables you to make quick margin notes as ideas occur to you. Hard copies are also easy to read and reduce any tendency you may have to edit or “correct” as you read. Additionally, some of the tips that follow are a little difficult to effect on a computer screen. Remember, if you choose to revise on screen, save both the original and revised copy.

### 2. **READ what you have written.**

While this may seem elementary, many of you, particularly when writing assignments for college courses, often find yourselves caught in the proverbial time crunch. Ideally, you have written your draft well in advance of any deadline and have allowed it to rest a few days before beginning the revision process. In this circumstance, reading reminds you of what you have written. On the other hand, college life is often less than ideal, and many of you find yourselves moving immediately from drafting to revising. So if you have just written your draft, why take the time to read it? Regardless of how clearly you outline, how logically you think, or how quickly you type, you read your writing to discover areas that might be improved through revision.

### 3. **Make notes.**

Circle, highlight, or note any issues that surface as you read. Perhaps a paragraph seems out of place or a sentence no longer makes sense. You may realize that your writing does not support your thesis or that you have strayed from your thesis statement completely. Maybe your enthusiasm for the topic has led you to include a few well-intentioned but unrelated rants. Whatever the concern, identify it and keep reading. You should not begin **expanding, condensing, honing, or opting** for a different course of action until you have read completely through your draft and identified areas that might benefit from revision.

### 4. **Make a reverse outline.**

Although you normally speak of outlining as a drafting technique, an easy way to determine if you have organization issues is to create a **reverse outline**. Instead of outlining what you intend to write, a reverse outline tells you what you have written, using one short statement to describe the main point of each paragraph. Now you can quickly identify whether you have omitted any important points or repeated yourselves.

The reverse outline also works well when applied to paragraph organization. However, when working with paragraph organization, do not outline what each sentence says; outline what each sentence does. For example, a reverse outline of the previous paragraph might look like this:

- a. Introduces reverse outline
- b. Explains reverse outline
- c. Lists benefits of reverse outline

If you need to expand your details, condense or clarify your ideas, or hone the arrangement of your sentences, a reverse outline helps determine where to start.

### 5. **Color-code your draft.**

Dig out the highlighters and start coloring. If you use one color for main points, one for transition statements, another for definitions, and still another for explanations or details, you will begin to recognize issues with organization, repetition, and balance.

This technique is particularly useful when writing compare/contrast essays, position papers, and arguments or when using source material. For example, when you color-code your writing in a compare/contrast essay, you should detect frequently alternating colors if you have used a point-by-point organization or large sections of each color if you have used a block arrangement. Highlighting sourced material used in any writing can help you recognize if you have relied too heavily on the words of others.

### **6. Cut up your draft.**

A great way to check transitions and organization of an essay is to cut it into pieces, literally. If you cut your essay into pieces, with each paragraph becoming a separate piece, you can discover overlooked problems and play with the arrangement of your essay. If after cutting your essay into separate pieces, you are unable to reassemble it, then revising of transitions and/or organization is in order. For an even more revealing exercise, you might have a friend attempt the reconstruction. If he or she is unable to put your essay back in order, it is time to revise.

This technique also works well for reviewing paragraph organization. You can write each sentence on a separate note card and then arrange the cards into a paragraph. You may discover issues that need attention, find that your initial arrangement is sufficient, or realize that an alternative organization works better than the original.

### **7. Create a paragraph paper or abstract.**

You can check the coherence of an essay and your organization by creating a paragraph paper. You simply create a paragraph by copying, first, your thesis statement and then each succeeding topic sentence from your draft into a single paragraph. If your paragraph is well organized, coherent, and reflective of the substance of your essay, you have written well. If, on the other hand, your paragraph seems disordered, vague, or untidy, it is time to expand, condense, hone, and consider your options.

### **8. Play one-on-one with your draft.**

Before you start balling up a draft and using the wastebasket as a basketball hoop, STOP!

Playing one-on-one is a quick and simple way to ensure that each portion of your essay defines, supports, or demonstrates your main idea. The rules of the game are simple; you simply write your thesis on an index card and then consider each body paragraph separately. Each paragraph should contain one central point that details, validates, or proves your thesis statement.

### **9. Turn the tables**

You can turn the tables on your writing and yourself by having another person, it does not matter whom, read your writing to you. The only stipulation for the reader is that he or she read exactly what you have written. As you listen, you become both writer and audience. As writers, you should hear what you intended to say; if what you hear differs from what you meant, revision is in order. But to turn the tables, you must also become deaf to “the writer,” to yourself, to your own ideas, opinions, and experiences. Turning the tables means you adopt the role, the ideas, opinions, and experiences of the audience to whom you are writing. Again, you listen not for what the writer meant, but for what the writing says. This is the ultimate test for any writing, that what the writer intends and what the audience receives are synonymous.

Turning the tables is a great method for identifying issues of style because while style refers to the way you employ language in your writing—how you organize your writing, your diction, your tone—writing styles, like fashion styles, are not constant. Depending on the purpose, audience,

and occasion, a writing style that is appropriate for one writing may be unacceptable for another. Because your writing derives from a specific circumstance, motivation, or occasion and because you write, or should, toward a specific goal, adopting the attitude of your intended audience allows you to assess your style.

### **10. Seek the opinions of others**

Most writing is meant to be read, and although many of you are uncomfortable sharing your writing with others, the reality is that others can spot weaknesses in your written material that you may never recognize on your own. From peers who are dealing with the same assignments, to friends and relatives who know you and your stories, to University Writing Center personnel who know good writing, your communities are filled with opportunities for identifying where your writing needs or might benefit from revision. To receive the greatest benefit possible, however, you must be specific, choosy, and responsible. If, for example, you are writing a personal essay about a life-altering experience and want to know if you have successfully conveyed the sequence of events, you should ask your reader, “Is the organization of the essay clear?” When writing arguments, asking the opinion of someone who disagrees with your point of view can help you strengthen your reasoning.

Ultimately, when you seek the opinions of others, the responsibility is yours. You must remain open to criticism, receptive to suggestions, and faithful to your writing and yourself. If you find yourself verbally explaining aspects of your writing to your readers, your writing needs revision. Whether you take a reader’s advice or disregard it entirely, the writing and responsibility belong to you as the writer.

### **ECHO-ing**

Having identified the areas of your writing that need improvement, “Revise! Revise! Revise!” echoes once again. Fortunately, when it comes to revision, ECHO-ing is extremely beneficial. As a mnemonic device, ECHO reminds you that revision is a cyclical process and helps you keep these basic approaches to revision in mind: elucidate, condense, hone, and opt to . . . .

#### **Elucidate**

Often a writing draft includes many of the main ideas you wish to share with readers but lacks the details, explanations, or examples needed to relate the significance of these points. Adding details, offering explanations, or providing examples should elucidate or illuminate for your readers what you are writing and the import of your ideas.

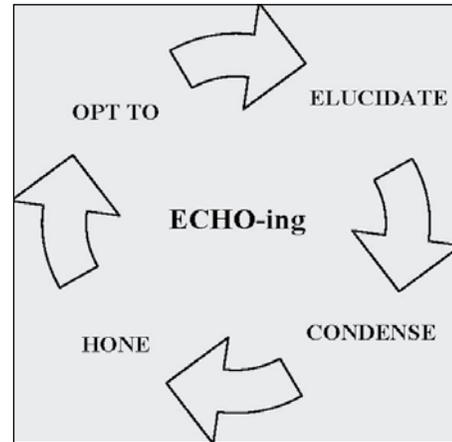
#### **Condense**

Even though expansion and explanation help communicate your thoughts, clarity is equally important, and this often means condensing your writing. Consider, for instance, writing an argument or position paper. While your draft may include lengthy passages aimed at appeasing readers who disagree with you, these passages weaken your position. Condensing these passages by simply recognizing and addressing opposing views can appease opponents, negate their positions, and strengthen your argument as well as clarify your overall writing.

#### **Hone**

Another method for improving your writing is to hone, that is refine, your style. Remember, style is not about what you write; rather, it is about the way you express yourself. When you hone your writing, you again consider your purpose, audience, and occasion. Imagine that you wish

to share a personal experience of having rumors told about you. Retelling the experience to friends, you might say of the offending party, “She lied on me.” If, however, your audience is your instructor rather than your friends, a more formal use of language is in order, such as, “She spread rumors about me.” If you wanted to express this sentiment in formal academic writing, you might write, “She told falsehoods about me.” Changing your style by altering your use of language does not mean sacrificing your voice. In fact, your voice gains power when your revisions consider purpose, audience, and/or occasion.



### Opt to...

During the revision process, your options are numerous. You may *opt to* eliminate vagueness by adding examples, add clarity by rearranging paragraphs, strengthen arguments by employing outside source material, or increase readability by altering your use of language. You may opt to continue ECHO-ing revision, or you may opt to move on to proofreading and editing. Some aspects of revision are, however, mandatory:

- Revision aims to improve.
- Revision addresses content, organization, and style.
- Revision considers writing purpose, audience, and occasion.

If you have addressed these points, progressing to editing may be your best option.

## REVISING TIMED WRITINGS

While revision is an important component of any writing process, it is particularly important for timed writings. Good revision often makes the difference between a successful timed writing and one that fails clearly to express your ideas, knowledge, and ability. As such, the first step to revising timed writings is including revision time in your writing plan and, if writing with pen and paper, leaving space for revisions. When you **REACH** for carefully considered, well-written compositions, certain revising techniques work extremely well when time is critical:

### Read

It's crunch time, but reading what you have written is crucial to revising wisely.

### Examine

Examine organization by making a reverse outline or, if time permits, a paragraph paper. If using a computer, color-coding is easy, informative, and quickly removable.

### Augment

You should not just add information; rather, you need to augment what you have written. By developing or clarifying your points, you improve your writing instead of merely lengthening it.

### Choose

Choose wisely! When you compose an essay that does not support your thesis statement, time limits often demand you change your thesis statement. Keep in mind that if your instructor defines your writing purpose, your new thesis statement must fulfill that purpose.

## Hesitate

Don't rush to turn your essay in. Take time to consider your audience and refine your language use accordingly. When time is a factor, you are more likely to express your ideas with informal, often conversational, language. Instructors often prefer you to employ language specific to and introduced through the material about which you are writing. Taking time to edit your language use often results in both clearer and more informed writing.

## PEER REVISION GUIDE

(Copy as needed)

Writer: \_\_\_\_\_ Reader: \_\_\_\_\_

Essay title: \_\_\_\_\_

To the readers: Your task is to assist the writer with his or her revising. First, read the submitted essay completely. Next, return to the beginning of the essay you are reviewing, and, using this handout as a guide, focus on issues of content, organization, and language use. Answer the following questions and any others your instructor may add. Explain your answers fully. Be polite but constructive. Ask questions of the writer. **DO NOT** edit the writing.

1. What is the thesis of the paper? *Quote explicitly from the paper.*
  - a. What is the paper about? *Provide, in your own words, a one-sentence summary.*
2. How does the writer introduce the essay?
  - a. What is the effect of this approach on you as a reader?
  - b. How would you introduce the essay?
  - c. Why?
3. How is the body of the essay organized? *Briefly outline the essay as written.*
  - a. How would you organize this essay?
  - b. Why?
4. How does the writer shape his or her writing to the assigned audience?
  - a. What revisions might the writer make to better address the audience?
5. How does the writer conclude the essay?

- a. What is the effect of this approach on you as a reader?
  - b. How would you conclude the essay?
  - c. Why?
6. How does the writer transition from one idea to another?
    - a. What is the effect?
  7. As a reader, what do you find most effective about the **writing** used in this essay?  
*Address how the essay is written, not what the essay is about.*
    - a. How would you address this issue?
  8. If this essay were due in one hour, what three revisions would be most constructive? *List in descending order of importance*

## Editing

### WHY EDIT?

As you read in the previous chapter, revision involves modifying content, organization, and style. Editing, on the other hand, is the polishing step of the writing process. When you edit, you make two basic kinds of changes.

1. You fix errors in grammar, mechanics, punctuation, spelling and formatting.
2. You improve the way you express your ideas. You may change words, sentence organization or punctuation to make your writing more vibrant and exciting, clearer, more specific or more direct. You find a more effective way to say what you want to say.

### WHEN SHOULD YOU EDIT?

The process of writing is not neatly divided into separate steps. It is natural to do some editing as you draft and revise. As you write a sentence, you probably constantly consider different words, organizations and types of punctuation. This kind of editing can get out of hand if, for example, you are still drafting and you get stuck on finding the precise word to use and end up losing the rest of the thought. Some writers have to discipline themselves to turn off their “internal editors” while they draft. When you speak of editing as a step, then, what you mean is the time when the activity of editing is your main focus.

It is time to change your primary focus to editing when you are satisfied that your essay meets the assignment requirements for content, organization, and style and when you feel you have addressed the global or big picture concerns in revision. You may be ready to move into the editing process when you can answer “yes” to the following questions:

## The Writing Process: Drafting, Revising and Editing

- Is my essay on topic?
- Do I have a clear, focused thesis statement?
- Does each paragraph focus on a single subject or part of the argument?
- Is my organization clear and easy to follow?
- Is my essay thoroughly developed with examples and explanations?
- Does my essay say what I want it to say?
- Is my essay complete (introduction, body, conclusion, title)?
- Am I meeting my instructor's requirements for purpose, audience, tone, and length?

Think of editing as similar to the final grooming for an animal competing in a show. The horse or dog, for example, has mastered the skills and knows how to take direction from the trainer, but the final part is making the animal look its best while it does that work. It would not make sense to finely groom and costume an animal that is still learning to follow the trainer's commands. The appearance of the animal is of little consequence if the animal cannot perform the routine or trick, just as perfect grammar, spelling, and punctuation in an essay are meaningless if there is weak content or organization.

You may have heard the words “editing” and “proofreading” used synonymously. For our purposes, you will refer to editing as the process of refining a paper that is basically complete by considering specific errors and small-scale improvements in grammar, mechanics, punctuation, word usage and sentence structure. When you speak of proofreading, it will refer to the last read-through of an essay for errors of any type but especially for spelling, spacing, duplications, omissions and formatting problems.

### IDENTIFYING YOUR PROBLEM AREAS

#### 1. Know yourself.

The most important thing you can do to become a better editor is know the types of mistakes you tend to make and the ineffective writing habits you have. One way to help you identify these areas is to take a diagnostic test and note the areas with the highest errors. However, such tests are not always as helpful as looking at your own writing because you approach the tests ready to hunt for errors – you know they are there – whereas, in your own writing, finding problems or places to improve can be much harder.

The best way to discover your problem areas is to ask your instructor to mark up your diagnostic or first essay thoroughly. Explain that you are trying to identify and work on your personal areas of weakness. Then, keep a record of your progress in these areas as you move through the semester. The worksheet at the end of this chapter can help you do this. Your primary job in editing is to know what kinds of errors you typically make and ineffective writing habits you have and to train yourself to locate and improve them.

#### 2. Take a break from your essay.

Even if it's just an hour, taking some time to focus on other things will give your mind a rest and allow you to return to the essay with an ability to see things in it that you might have missed otherwise. If possible, give yourself an entire day off before beginning the editing process.

#### 3. Have someone read your essay aloud to you.

Editing can be tricky work because by the time you get to this part of the process you have likely read your essay many times. Regardless of what you have actually written, your brain

knows very well what you meant to say! As you read for editing purposes, your mind can insert words, punctuation, or other corrections that are not in the text. Instruct the reader to read *exactly* what you have written slowly, following your punctuation and wording exactly. When you hear something that doesn't sound right to you, stop and take a closer look at that word or sentence, and change it or discuss it with your reader. Tell your reader to stop when there is something he or she sees that may be a problem, too. This is an especially good way to catch repetition and clarity problems.

#### 4. Read your essay backwards.

Beginning with the last sentence, consider just one sentence at a time. Make any necessary changes before moving on to the next (previous) sentence. Reading your sentences out of order will help you see and hear them differently. It can keep you from subconsciously adding words that aren't really there or rewording sentences in your mind. It may also be helpful in this strategy to read each sentence aloud or to have someone else read it to you. This is an especially good way to catch fragments and spelling, punctuation, sentence clarity or word usage problems.

#### 5. Actively participate in editing workshops.

If your instructor separates revision workshops from editing workshops, he or she is giving you a big gift! Have your essay ready for other students to edit, and give them the benefit of your unique way of seeing their essays. Your job in an editing workshop is first to mark what you see. You may see problems the writer wouldn't find on his or her own. If time permits, you can offer suggestions for how to correct or improve other's work. You don't have to know or understand all of the rules of grammar to be a helpful editor. Mark what you *do* see and understand, and you will help the other members of your writing community become better writers. If workshops aren't offered in your class, you can always go to the University Writing Center, ask a friend for help, or conference with your instructor to get a similar experience.

### ADDRESSING YOUR PROBLEM AREAS

#### Use your resources for specific grammar, mechanics and punctuation help.

You have several tools that can help you improve your grammar, mechanics and punctuation problem areas:

- The chapter, "Reviews for Editing"
- Grammar handbooks such as the *Harbrace Handbook*
- The University Writing Center – you can schedule a session just to focus on a problem area.
- Handouts from the University Writing Center's website

#### Using Microsoft Word's "Find" Feature

From the "Edit" pull-down menu, select the "Find" tool. Type the word or phrase you want to search for in your essay. Check the box marked "Highlight all items found in" and choose "Main Document" when the pull-down menu appears. When you click "Find All," all instances of the word or phrase will be highlighted in your essay.

#### Use a thesaurus...with caution!

A thesaurus can be a great tool to help you vary your word choices. It can also suggest words that are not exactly (or not at all) what you desire to say. Look up the suggested word in a dictionary to confirm the definition before you use it. Remember that longer words are not always better words, and choose words that you can actually hear yourself saying. Use a thesaurus to help you be you with more variety.

## The Writing Process: Drafting, Revising and Editing

- In-class grammar lessons
- Another student
- Your instructor

### **Replace overused words and phrases.**

Make a list of the words and ideas that are most important to your essay or that you have a sense may appear repeatedly within it. Scan your essay for repeated words or phrases. These could be key words, sentence beginnings or filler words and constructions such as “there is” or “for example.” Use Microsoft Word’s “Find” feature to search for specific words or phrases. If a word or phrase appears more than three times in the essay or more than two times in a paragraph, consider re-wording it or substituting a synonym.

### **Eliminate clichés.**

Clichés are comparisons or other descriptive phrases that once were unusual or striking in a way that helped make a description more understandable or clear. Because of overuse, however, they have lost their power to evoke helpful, clarifying or memorable pictures. Some clichés are pretty obvious (as clear as a bell, I knew in an instant, fish out of water, do-it-yourself, going digital, information age, dog tired, apple of my eye), but others may be unfamiliar to you. When you find a phrase you think is a cliché or to help you find clichés in your essay, ask yourself if you’ve heard other people use this phrase. If the answer is yes, you may have identified a cliché. Consider re-wording the phrase to express what you want to say in a different way.

### **Use vivid verbs.**

Look closely at your verbs. Sometimes a form of “be” (is, be, am, are, was, were, been, being) is the best choice, but often, those are default verbs which you could replace with a more precise or interesting word. Consider replacing common activity words such as “saw,” “drank,” “ate,” “went,” and “said” with more precise descriptions such as “spied,” “gulped,” “nibbled,” “ambled,” or “stammered.”

### **Use voice purposefully.**

The voice of a verb refers to who or what is performing the action. If the subject of the sentence is acting, the verb is in the active voice. (The dog ate the bone.) If the subject of the sentence is being acted upon, the verb is in the passive voice. (The bone is being eaten by the dog.) Many students slip into passive voice without realizing it because they believe it sounds more sophisticated. These are not good reasons to use the passive voice. Passive voice is useful when the person or thing performing the action is unknown or when you desire tactfully to avoid identifying the person who is acting (to avoid placing blame, for example). Passive voice can also be useful to emphasize someone or something’s lack of freedom or inability to do something for him/her/itself. Otherwise, it is often best to use the active voice.

To locate instances of passive voice in your essay, look for verbs that consist of two or more words; if the parts include a form of the verb *be* plus the past participle of another verb, you probably have an example of passive voice (was stolen, is helped, are spoken, will be narrated). Another way to identify passive voice is to look for verb phrases followed by the word *by* (The rules were explained *by* the teacher.) Often, sentences in the passive voice use *by* after the verb to explain who or what is doing the action. To revise passive verbs, rewrite the sentence so that the person or thing performing the action comes first (The teacher *explained* the rules. or The teacher *will explain* the rules.).

### **Vary sentence types and lengths.**

Repetition of the same sentence structure can become boring and distract your reader just as word repetition does. There are four basic types of sentences and many different variations within them, but many writers use only one or two main types. Other writers try to use different types but the ideas become lost in them. The first step to sentence variety is to write your thoughts in a clear way even if that means using a very simple or short sentence. Then, you can change the structure or length of the sentences for variety and emphasis. If you have a complex thought, a simple sentence might be best. If you desire to emphasize an idea or event, a short sentence might be best. Longer and more complex is not always better! Read the “Reviews for Restrictive and Non-restrictive Clauses,” “Review of Coordination,” and “Review of Fragments and Subordination” for ideas to help you vary your sentences and to use sentences to help you emphasize what is most important in a clear way.

### **Consider your audience and instructor in your pronoun choices.**

When you refer to a single person whose gender you do not know or do not wish to reveal, you have several choices of pronouns. In the past, the default pronoun for this situation was “he,” which was considered correct even if it referred, ultimately, to a girl or woman. Today, the blanket use of “he” to refer to men and women is not widely accepted. Some people use “he or she.” Others prefer “he/she” or “s/he.” (“The professor handed out his/her assignment sheet.”) Some even use “she” to refer to anyone (as “he” was used in the past). Although it has long been considered grammatically incorrect, in speech and informal writing, you probably hear “they” used often to refer to a single person as well. Follow your instructor’s preference. If he or she has no preference, be consistent within your essay. Do not treat the different forms as synonyms; choose one and stick to it.

### **Be consistent in your verb tense.**

When you are writing your own narrative, it is appropriate to talk about things that happened in the past in past tense and those that are occurring in the present in present tense and the future in future tense. Switching back and forth between them, however, is hard to do well and can be very confusing for your reader. Use signal words and phrases to help your reader follow necessary shifts in verb tense. For example, “I thought I had caused the car wreck. *Two years* have passed *since* the accident, and I *now* understand that it wasn’t my fault. I don’t blame myself *anymore*...” If you are not describing things that happen in different times, stick with one verb tense.

### **Proofread carefully.**

It may not seem fair, but small errors and typos in a final draft tend to communicate carelessness to your audience. When you fail to correct errors such as these, the audience often assumes that you didn’t care enough to proofread thoroughly or at all. If there are many such errors, your audience could begin to question your content or argument. Fresh eyes – yours and at least one other person’s – are essential for thorough proofreading! Even if you understand all the formatting rules, if you are overtired or have worked too long without a break from the essay, you will not be as likely to catch the small errors when you are proofreading it.

### **Spelling**

Always run spell check, but never rely on it! Spell checkers don’t know what you meant to type; they can only match what word in their database is closest in spelling to what you actually did type. Those can be two very different things. When a spell checker suggests a replacement for a

word, don't assume that it's the right spelling of the word you intended. If you aren't sure, use a dictionary to check the meaning of the suggested word before you blindly accept the change.

### Spacing

Be consistent in your use of one or two spaces after end punctuation marks. If your instructor states a preference, space accordingly. Look carefully at spaces that appear too large or too small and add or delete as necessary.

### Duplication and Omission

When you revise, you may add and remove many words and sentences or cut and paste parts repeatedly to try out different ways of ordering your thoughts. It is easy to end up with duplicate or missing words, phrases or punctuation marks. Consider especially the ends and beginnings of lines for places in which you may have typed something twice in a row or where you may have left out something altogether.

### Formatting

Follow your instructor's directions for your margins, header, page numbering, title, line spacing and source documentation and citing. Directions for formatting your paper in MLA style appear in the MLA section.

## PEER EDITING WORKSHEET

As a peer editor, your primary job is to help another person see what he or she may miss when editing his or her own writing. You do not need to fix or even offer suggestions for the problems you identify. The writer's job is to decide how he or she wants to address the problems. Focus your energy on finding errors and places that could be more effectively worded, arranged in sentences, or punctuated. Use a marking method that works for you (highlighters, circles, symbols from the front cover of this book, a word or two to explain what you see, etc.). Keep it simple, and make sure the writer understands the words or symbols you choose.

1. Read for errors (punctuation, confused words, subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement, fragments, run-on/fused sentences, faulty parallelism, capitalization).
2. Read for variety.  
Excessive repetition of words or phrases Sentence structure or type Sentence length
3. Read for precision.  
Overused adjectives and adverbs (very, too, so) Weak verbs (overuse of forms of *be* or common verbs) Clichés (information age, today's society)
4. Read for voice.  
Mark use of the passive voice that seems more habitual than purposeful. (The birthday present *was opened*).
5. Read for consistency.  
Pronouns to refer to a single person of unknown gender (he or she, he/she, they) Verb tense shifts Use of words as synonyms that are not really synonyms
6. Read for clarity.  
Mark word choices that get in the way of or complicate the sentence's meaning. Mark sentence structures that get in the way of the idea the author is trying to express.

7. Proofread.

Spelling Spacing Duplicate words, phrases or punctuation (check for widows and orphans) Missing words Formatting Documentation and citation (if necessary)

**ESSAY GRID**

Use this chart to help you identify and track your problem areas. When you receive your diagnostic essay back, note the two or three most common problems your instructor marked. These may be errors such as comma splices and subject-verb agreement or ineffective writing habits such as overuse of the passive voice or clichés.

List those as areas to focus on, and note the number of times they show up in your essay in the diagnostic row. Use the resources you have to help you learn to recognize each problem in your own writing and correct or improve it.

If you are working on your areas of greatest need, they may change during the semester. As you focus on your most frequent errors or habits, those may diminish while others may be more important for you to put energy toward. Use this chart to add other areas as necessary.

| Essay      | Area #1: | Area #2: | Area #3: | Area #4: | Area #5: | Area #6: |
|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Diagnostic |          |          |          |          |          |          |
| 1          |          |          |          |          |          |          |
| 2          |          |          |          |          |          |          |
| 3          |          |          |          |          |          |          |
| 4          |          |          |          |          |          |          |
| 5          |          |          |          |          |          |          |