

Self-Guided Revision Worksheet

Finished with your first draft? It can be tempting to give it a quick proofread and then call it a final draft, but then you might miss out on the best version of your paper! This is where revision comes in. The steps below will help you take a step back from your paper, see the big picture, and zoom in on important areas of improvement.



1. **Create a reverse outline of your paper to help you revise your overall essay structure.** Maybe you wrote an outline before you started writing, but chances are that you added, subtracted, and shuffled ideas around as you were writing.
 - a. Write your thesis and each topic sentence on a fresh sheet of paper. This is the skeleton of your paper. Would someone have the correct understanding of everything you covered in the essay if you showed them only this skeleton? Are your topic sentences all clearly related to and supporting your thesis? Do you need to revise your thesis to better capture the direction of your paper, or add another paragraph or two to completely address everything you promised you would cover in your thesis?
 - b. Then, reread each paragraph and, in a separate list, see if you can distill each paragraph that you have into one main idea, expressed in one word or phrase. Are there any repeated words that are separated? Consider whether you should put those paragraphs together in your final draft. Are you having trouble coming up with only one word or phrase? You may have more than one idea in the paragraph, so it needs to be broken in two.
2. **Revisit each paragraph specifically to make sure it is well developed.** Now that you have your essay's overall structure in order, it is time to ensure your paragraphs are well structured.
 - a. Check to see if each paragraph has at least one example or piece of evidence in support of the point you are making. (This point should already be clearly stated in your topic sentence!)
 - b. Make sure that each example or piece of evidence is followed by at least a sentence or two explaining the significance of this example or evidence. How is it relevant? How does it prove your point? What should a reader take away from it? (Do not leave your reader to connect the dots! That is your job!)
 - c. Is there a final sentence in each paragraph that wraps up the point you were making and ties it back to the overall argument of the paper?

- d. Are there transitions between each paragraph? A simple transition word or phrase could help, such as “Additionally” or “On the other hand,” but you could also spend the first part of a topic sentence looking back on the last paragraph and then the second part of the sentence looking forward to the paragraph ahead.
 - i. Check out our handout on Transitions!
3. **Once you know that your paragraphs are well-structured and well-developed, you can begin focusing on sentence-level changes.** This is not just proofreading: you should look at sentence structure, word choice, and tone.
 - a. Are all of your sentences short and to the point? Are all of them long and filled with clauses and commas? Engaging writing has sentences of varying lengths: short sentences pack a punch, and longer, more complex sentences show the connection between ideas.
 - b. Is your word choice specific and appropriate for the audience? Avoid any vague descriptors like “good,” “bad,” “really,” or “things.” Check out synonyms for words, but make sure to check the dictionary to ensure they have the right meaning. Make sure that your word choice is formal for academic writing: break up contractions like “don’ t,” avoid “I” and “you,” and replace informal language like “deal with” or “kind of.”
 - i. Check out our handout on Word Choice: Informal and Formal Language!
 - c. Good grammar makes its appearance here: check to make sure that you do not have any run-on sentences or fragments. Each sentence should be one complete thought, with a subject doing something.
 - i. Reading your writing out loud can help you identify sentences that go on and on without punctuation where you pause.
 - ii. Reading your paper “backwards,” looking at only one sentence at a time from the bottom up so that you do not get distracted by the flow of ideas, can also help you zoom in on just if the sentence at hand is grammatically correct.
4. **The last step took us into editing at the sentence level, and now it is time to proofread.**
 - a. Take a break from the paper for a day if you can, so you can look at the paper with fresh eyes.
 - b. Print out your paper if you have been writing on the computer. Having a paper copy in front of you, away from where you were writing, can help you break out of “writing mode.”
 - c. Check out our Proofreading Tips handout for more suggestions!