

Congratulations on completing your draft! Now, it's time to take one of the most important steps in the writing process: revising the text. When you draft your text, you get the ideas on paper. When you revise the text, you look at the ideas from a new perspective. It's time to give some focused thought to the ways in which your audience might see your ideas. After all of the work you've done so far, it's definitely worth your time to try to make the message as clear to your audience as possible.

Reviewing Your Document (Revising and Editing)

Check the Organization

When you write about a topic, it's important to organize the information in a way that's easy for the reader to follow. Sometimes, during the drafting stage, writers will include all of the necessary information, but the order of the information may be difficult for a reader to understand. To check your organization, take the following steps:

Read through each individual section or paragraph of the paper. In the margin next to that section or paragraph, write down the main idea that you would like to communicate with your reader in that particular paragraph.

When you're finished writing down the main ideas, take a bird's-eye view of your paper. Look at the order of your main ideas. Does it make sense to discuss the information in that order, or would it be helpful to move certain paragraphs or sections to other areas in the paper?

Look at each individual paragraph or section, along with the main point that you were hoping to communicate in that particular section. Ask yourself if every sentence in that paragraph contributes to your main point. If not, does the sentence belong someplace else in the paper? Or, should the sentence be taken out of the paper completely? Also, ask yourself if any points of information are repeated unnecessarily, or if additional points are needed to fully communicate the main point of the paragraph.

Check the Wording and Sentence Structure

If a document contains awkward sentences or misspelled words, the reader will stop focusing on what the writer is trying to say. A few different options are available to help writers to present information in a way that is easy for the reader to understand.

Set the Work Aside

Put the document away, and take it out a day or more later to read it again. Setting the document aside for a day or more can help you to see things that you may not have seen immediately after you drafted the text.

Read the Document Out Loud

Your roommate may wonder what you're doing, but reading a document out loud can help you to **hear** things that need to be revised. Often times, if it doesn't sound right when you say it out loud, it won't be clear to your audience either.

Read the Document Backwards or Use a Ruler

It's easy to miss awkward sentences when you are focusing on the flow of your ideas. However, if you read the document backwards one sentence at a time, then it's easier to find individual sentences that don't sound quite right.

If you want to double check for spelling and typing errors, you can also read the document backwards one word at a time. This will help you to identify typing errors and repeated words.

Another trick for catching those elusive errors is to use a ruler. Place the ruler directly under the line of text you are reading. This forces you to focus on no more than one line at a time, slowing you down, and increasing the likelihood of catching those errors.

Test It Out

Sometimes, it's helpful to have someone else read the document before you give the final draft to its intended audience. However, remember that as the writer, it's important that you know the reason behind any changes that you make. Accepting suggestions blindly can lead you to a finished product that does not meet the standards of your actual audience.

Check the Spelling and Grammar

Many word processing programs have spelling and grammar checks that can help you to recognize and correct errors. Be sure, however, to be careful of the changes that you make. Both spell check and grammar check have limitations. For example, spell check identifies many names as misspelled words, and it often suggests changes. Never blindly accept the changes that your computer suggests; instead, try to understand the reasoning behind the changes, and make a conscious choice as to whether or not you will make the change that the computer suggests.

Meet Audience Expectations

If you have a checklist or a list of instructions for the document, compare that list with your draft. Double check to see if your draft meets the expectations that the audience has requested.

Reviewing the Work of Others

Peer reviews cause problems for a lot of people. It's not unusual to hear comments like the following:

"How can I critique someone else's writing when I'm not a good writer?"

"I don't want to hurt someone's feelings."

"I don't want to give someone wrong information."

Perhaps, if you fully understand your role as a peer reviewer, you'll be more comfortable and more willing to fully participate.

Reviewing Early Drafts

Your role as a peer reviewer of a first draft includes the following:

Identify *possible* problems with a document. If you see something that you think might be a problem, but you're not sure, say so! Write a comment like, *"This doesn't seem quite right, but I'm not sure."*

A comment like this is infinitely better than no comment at all. At least you have alerted the writer to a possible problem. At that point, it is the writer's responsibility to deal with it. The writer can choose to ignore your comment, make a change based on your comment, or seek a third opinion.

Point out what you like about a document. One of the ways to minimize hurt feelings is to not focus exclusively on what's wrong with a document. When you see a passage that you really like, write a little note; you might make someone's day.

Suggest possible improvements. Even a draft that is really well written can be improved. Offer suggestions for making improvements even to those really well-written papers. You might write something like, *"This is really well written! Have you considered adding a paragraph that..."*

Write helpful comments. Few things are more frustrating to a writer than comments that aren't particularly helpful. For example, suppose someone made the following comment in the margin of your document: *"Change this."* As the writer, you're wondering, *"What does she want me to change?"* A better comment might be, *"I can't identify the focus of this paragraph."* At least the writer knows why the reviewer is suggesting a change.

When offering commentary on a document, consider the three C's: complete, coherent, and concise. A complete document has a clear beginning, a clear ending, and enough detail throughout. In addition, a coherent document is one that flows; you don't get lost as a reader. Have you ever been reading a book or article and found yourself having to go back and re-read something? Often, that is a signal that there is a coherence problem. If you find yourself having to re-read a passage in a peer paper, make a note of it so the writer can take a closer look and clarify. Finally, concise document is efficient in its use of words. All of the content clearly relates to the purpose of the document and avoids repetitiveness.

Did you notice that there are no references to spelling, punctuation, and grammar in this list? That's what peer reviewers tend to want to focus on. They should, however, save that for later drafts, focusing on content first.

Reviewing Later Drafts

Only in the later drafts should you focus in on spelling, punctuation, and other mechanical issues of writing. Strategies for this type of review are described in the previous section.

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