

General Areas of Revision

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about where you should focus your revision efforts when preparing written communication in a professional context. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. The Revision Process

Just when you think the production of your document is done, the revision process begins. The writing process requires effort, from overcoming writer's block to the intense concentration that composing a document often involves. It is only natural to have a sense of relief when your document is drafted from beginning to end.

This relief is false confidence, though. Your document is not complete, and in its current state it could, in fact, do more harm than good. Errors, omissions, and unclear phrases may lurk within your document, waiting to reflect poorly on you when it reaches your audience.

Now is not the time to let your guard down, prematurely celebrate, or mentally move on to the next writing task. Instead, think of the revision process as one that hardens and strengthens your document.

General revision requires attention to:

- Content
- Organization
- Style
- Readability

These four main categories should give you a template from which to begin to explore details in depth.

1a. Evaluating Content

Content is only one aspect of your document, and it should address the central questions of who, what, where, when, why, and how within the range and parameters of the assignment.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Let's say you were assigned a report on the sales trends for a specific product in a relatively new market. You could produce a one-page chart comparing last year's results to current figures and call it a day, but would it clearly and concisely deliver content that is useful and correct? Are you supposed to highlight trends? Are you supposed to spotlight factors that contributed to the increase or decrease? Are you supposed to include projections for next year?

The point is that you want to ensure that your text fulfills the purpose you intend it to.

When revising your content, ask yourself the following questions:

1. *Have I included the content that corresponds to the given assignment?*
2. *Have I left any out information that may be necessary to fulfill the expectations?*
3. *Have I gone beyond the assignment directions and included unnecessary information?*

1b. Evaluating Organization

Organization is another key aspect of any document. Standard formats that include an introduction, body, and conclusion are likely part of your writing task.

When revising your organization, ask yourself the following questions:

1. *Did I decide on a direct or indirect approach?*A direct approach will announce the main point or purpose at the beginning, while an indirect approach will present an introduction before the main point.
2. *Is my organizing principle clear to the reader?*Your document may use any of a wide variety of organizing principles, such as chronological, spatial, or comparison/contrast.
3. *Did I use effective transitions between sentences and paragraphs?*Readers often have difficulty following a document if the writer makes the common error of failing to make one point relevant to the next, or to illustrate the relationships between the points.
4. *Does my conclusion mirror my introduction rather than introduce new material?*While conclusions can sometimes benefit from looking to the future of an issue, they are not the place to introduce new information.

1c. Evaluating Style

Style is created through content and organization, but also involves word choice and grammatical structures.

When revising with style in mind, ask yourself the following questions:

1. *Is my text written in an informal or formal tone, or does it present a blend or awkward mismatch?*
2. *Does my text provide a coherent and unifying voice with a professional tone?*



If you are collaborating on the project with other writers or contributors, pay special attention to unifying the document across the different authors' styles of writing. Even if they were all to write in a professional, formal style, the document may lack a consistent voice. Read it out loud— can you tell who is writing what? If so, that is a clear clue that you need to do more revising in terms of style.

1d. Evaluating Readability

Readability refers to the reader's ability to read and comprehend the document. As a business writer, your goal is to make your writing clear and concise, not complex and challenging.

When revising with readability in mind, ask yourself the following questions:

1. *Is my language appropriate for my audience?*
2. *Do I communicate my ideas in an understandable way while still maintaining a professional tone?*



HINT

You can often use the "Tools" menu of your word processing program to determine the approximate reading level of your document. The program will evaluate the number of characters per word, add in the number of words per sentence, and come up with a rating. It may also note the percentage of passive sentences, and other information that will allow you to evaluate readability. Like any computer-generated rating, it should serve as one point of evaluation, but not the only point. Your conscious effort to choose words you perceive as appropriate for the audience will serve you better than any computer evaluation of your writing.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that written communication requires revision after being drafted. **The revision process** helps identify any errors, omissions, or unclear phrases that can impede communication. There are four areas of attention for general revision: **evaluating content**, **evaluating organization**, **evaluating style**, and **evaluating readability**. Reviewing your written document for these four areas, and revising as needed, demonstrates your professionalism and skill to your readers.

Best of luck in your learning!

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