

Revising and Editing

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn the purpose of and techniques for revising and editing your academic research essay. Specifically, this lesson will focus on:

1. Revising and Editing

Revising and **editing** are the two tasks you undertake to significantly improve your essay. Both are very important elements of the writing process.

IN CONTEXT

You may know that athletes miss catches, fumble balls, or overshoot goals. Dancers forget steps, turn too slowly, or miss beats. Web designers seek better images, a more clever design, or a more appealing background for their web pages. Writing has the same capacity to profit from improvement and revision.

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

1. 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.
2. When you edit, you take a second look at how you expressed your ideas. You add or change words, fix any sentence structure issues, and improve your writing style. You make your essay into a polished, mature piece of writing—the end product of your best efforts.



TERMS TO KNOW

Revising

The process of re-envisioning an essay or other writing project.

Editing

The process of improving the sentences, word choices, and overall style of an essay or other piece of writing.

2. Revising Concerns

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 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 there 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 throughout the essay as a whole.

2a. Creating Unity

Sometimes writers get caught up in the moment and cannot resist a good digression. Even though you might enjoy such detours when you chat with friends, unplanned digressions usually harm a piece of writing.

IN CONTEXT

Mariah stayed close to her outline when she drafted the three body paragraphs of her essay she tentatively titled “Digital Technology: The Newest and the Best at What Price?” But a recent shopping trip for an HDTV upset her enough that she digressed from the main topic of her third paragraph and included comments about the sales staff at the electronics store she visited.

When she revised her essay, she deleted the off-topic sentences that affected the unity of the paragraph:

Nothing is more confusing than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of people who want a new high-definition digital television (HDTV) with a large screen to watch sports and DVDs on. ~~You could listen to the guys in the electronics store, but word has it they know little more than you do. They want to sell you what they have in stock, not what best fits your needs.~~ You face decisions you never had to make with the old, bulky picture-tube televisions. Screen resolution means the number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often 1080p, or full HD, or 768p. The trouble is that if you have a smaller screen, 32 inches or 37 inches diagonal, you won't be able to tell the difference with the naked eye. ~~The 1080p televisions cost more, though, so those are what the salespeople want you to buy. They get bigger commissions.~~ The ~~other~~ important decision you face as you walk around the sales floor is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD screen. ~~Now here the salespeople may finally give you decent info.~~ Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma screens show truer blacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. ~~But be careful and tell the salespeople you have budget constraints.~~ Large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD models. Don't ~~let someone make you~~ buy more television than you need!

2b. 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. Transitions are not the only way to improve coherence, but they are often useful and give a mature feel to your essays.

IN CONTEXT

After Mariah revised for unity, she next examined her paragraph about televisions to check for coherence. She looked for places where she needed to add a transition or perhaps reword the text to make the flow of ideas clear.

In the version that follows, she has already deleted the sentences that were off-topic:

Finally, nothing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of people who want a new high-definition digital television (HDTV) with a large screen to watch sports and DVDs on. There's a good reason for this confusion: You face decisions you never had to make with the old, bulky picture-tube televisions. The first big decision is the screen resolution you want. Screen resolution means the number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. This resolution is often 1080p, or full HD, or 768p. The trouble is that if you have a smaller screen, 32 inches or 37 inches diagonal, you won't be able to tell the difference with the naked eye. The second important decision you face as you walk around the sales floor is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD screen. Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma screens show truer blacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. However, large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD models. Don't buy more television than you need!

3. Editing Concerns

Some writers are very methodical and painstaking when they write a first draft. Other writers unleash a lot of words in order to get out all that they feel they need to say. No matter which description best fits you, the first draft of almost every piece of writing can be made clearer and more concise.

If you have a tendency to write too much, you will need to look for unnecessary words. If you have a tendency to be vague or imprecise in your wording, you will need to find specific words to replace any overly general language.

3a. Identifying Wordiness

Sometimes writers use too many words when fewer words will appeal more to their audience and better fit their purpose. Eliminating wordiness helps all readers because it makes your ideas clear, direct, and straightforward.

Here are some common examples of wordiness to look for in your draft:

1. Sentences that begin with "There is" or "There are."

Wordy: *There are two major experiments that the Biology Department sponsors.*

Edited: *The Biology Department sponsors two major experiments.*

2. Sentences with unnecessary modifiers.

Wordy: *Two extremely famous and well-known consumer advocates spoke eloquently in favor of the proposed important legislation.*

Edited: *Two well-known consumer advocates spoke in favor of the proposed legislation.*

3. Sentences with "filler" phrases that add little to the meaning. Be judicious when you use "in terms of," "on the subject of," "more or less," "whether or not," 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.*

Edited: *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.*

4. 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.

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.*

Edited: *Using a GPS device benefits drivers who have a poor sense of direction.*

5. Sentences with constructions that can be shortened.

Wordy: *The e-book reader, which is a recent invention, may become as commonplace as the cell phone. My over-sixty uncle bought an e-book reader, and his wife bought an e-book reader, too.*

Edited: *The e-book reader, a recent invention, may become as commonplace as the cell phone. My over-sixty uncle and his wife both bought e-book readers.*

3b. Choosing Specific, Appropriate Words

Most college essays should be written in formal English suitable for an academic situation.

Follow these principles to be sure that your word choice is appropriate:

1. Avoid slang. Find alternatives to words like "bummer," "cool," and "rad."
2. Similarly, avoid language that is overly casual. Write about "men and women" rather than "girls and guys" unless you are trying to create a specific effect. A formal tone calls for formal language.
3. Avoid contractions. Use "do not" in place of "don't," "I am" in place of "I'm," "have not" in place of "haven't," and so on. Contractions are considered casual speech.
4. Avoid clichés. Overused expressions, such as "green with envy," "face the music," "better late than never," and others, are empty of meaning and may not appeal to your audience.
5. 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.

6. Choose words with the connotations you want. Choosing a word for its connotations is as important in formal essay writing as it is in other kinds of writing. For instance, compare the positive connotations of the word "proud" to the negative connotations of the words "arrogant" and "conceited."
7. 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.

IN CONTEXT

Read the revisions Mariah made to make her third paragraph clearer and more concise. She has already incorporated the changes she made to improve unity and coherence.

Finally, nothing ~~confuses buyers more than purchasing is more confusing to me than choosing among televisions. It confuses lots of people who want~~ a new high-definition digital television (HDTV), ~~with a large screen to watch sports and DVDs on. and with~~ There's a good reason ~~for this confusion: You face decisions you never had to make with the old, bulky picture tube televisions.~~ The first big decision ~~is involves the~~ screen resolution, ~~you want.~~ which ~~Screen resolution~~ means the number of horizontal scan lines the screen can show. The resolution is often ~~expressed as~~ 1080p, or full HD, or ~~as~~ 768p, ~~which is half that.~~ The trouble is that ~~on if you have~~ a smaller ~~screen,~~ 32-inches diagonal ~~screen,~~ viewers will ~~not you won't~~ be able to tell the difference with the naked eye. The second important decision ~~you face as you walk around the sales floor~~ is whether to get a plasma screen or an LCD screen. Plasma flat-panel television screens can be much larger in diameter than their LCD rivals. Plasma screens show ~~deeper truer~~ blacks and can be viewed at a wider angle than current LCD screens. However, large flat-panel plasma screens are much more expensive than flat-screen LCD models. ~~Buyers should only open their wallets when they are sure of what they want. Don't buy more television than you need!~~



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **revising and editing** are important steps in the writing process because they give you the opportunity to improve your paper before submitting a final draft. Major **revising concerns** include **creating unity** and **creating coherence**, while major **editing concerns** include **identifying wordiness** and **choosing specific, appropriate words**.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This content has been adapted from Lumen Learning's "Revising and Editing" tutorial.



TERMS TO KNOW

Editing

The process of improving the sentences, word choices, and overall style of an essay or other piece of

writing.

Revising

The process of re-envisioning an essay or other writing project.