

Revising, Editing, and Proofreading

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn what the revising, editing, and proofreading steps of the writing process look like, and how each contributes to creating a successful finished draft. You will also explore how these steps in the writing process improve your communication skill. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Final Stages of the Writing Process
2. Purpose of Revising
3. Feedback
4. Purpose of Editing
5. Purpose of Proofreading

1. Final Stages of the Writing Process

It's important to remember that writing is a process, not a product. For every finished, polished, solid essay, there were multiple drafts that developed towards that finished piece. Those drafts are necessary for the final piece, so you can't skip any of the steps and still hope to have a successful final version.

After you complete a draft, you'll need to:

- Revise
- Edit
- Proofread

These steps might sound similar, but they're actually distinct parts of the process. Considering them one by one allows you to focus on each individual element carefully. The more work you do after your draft, the better your essay will be. If you don't do any of that work, then you might have wasted all of that writing you did in the first place.

An essay that's turned in with errors that could have been fixed through editing, revising, or proofreading can cause you to lose credibility with your reader. Therefore, think about these final stages as the quality control of your writing process.

2. Purpose of Revising

The first of the final stages of the writing process will be **revising**. This is a different stage than editing, which will look at the sentences themselves to assess how well they articulate the argument.

Revising is also different from proofreading, where you'll check your writing to make sure that it follows the rules. There's no sense in doing those two steps, editing and proofreading, if you're going to take out, add in, or otherwise change all those sentences themselves.

Revising is the stage when you think about the big picture of your arguments, assessing your overall argumentation, support, evidence, assertions, etc.

In this step, you might:

- Add in relevant details that you missed the first time through.
- Take out irrelevant content that you now realize doesn't really help your argument.
- Reorder the body paragraphs to change the way your reader works through the argument.
- Conduct additional research if you find that your argument needs more support or evidence to back up your claims.
- Rethink the thesis statement if it no longer matches your argument.
- Rewrite your introduction and conclusion to reflect those changes.

Many people revise by printing out a draft and writing on it with red pen, doing a reverse outline, or looking through how each paragraph contributes to the thesis. You can do your revision either on paper or on your computer, depending on your personal preference.



TERM TO KNOW

Revising

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

3. Feedback

Revision often involves getting feedback from others. In a workplace setting, the feedback might come from your manager or a colleague. In college, feedback might come from a peer (especially one you consider to be a good writer). But another good source of feedback is anyone who represents your target audience, who is an expert on the content in the article, or who has insights that will be valuable to your revision process.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** If you are writing an orientation guide for new employees at a company you've worked at for several years, you might want feedback from a recent hire to help identify areas where your familiarity with the company norms and lingo have led to sentences or paragraphs that are not clear to people without that knowledge.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** If you are writing a software training manual, you would want feedback from a developer or expert to make sure all the details are correct and represent best practices.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** If you are writing a guide on accommodations when you yourself do not have a disability, it is a good idea to ask a person who is disabled and more sensitive to the subtle connotations or bias the writing might reveal. Readers like this are sometimes called "sensitivity readers," but you can simply think of them as an expert on the topic you are writing about.

Asking for feedback is asking others for their time and expertise, so be mindful of this in addressing and responding to feedback. It can be hard to set your feelings aside if the comments are critical, but knowing how to take criticism is also part of the writing process and will ultimately help you with both the immediate goal of writing the current assignment and the long-term goal of becoming a better writer.

4. Purpose of Editing

Once you've revised and have a draft that you're sure contains all the info that you want and no info that you don't want, you're ready for **editing** to make sure that the sentences are pulling their weight.

When revising, you focused on re-seeing and rethinking the whole argument's ideas, support, and organization. Here, you're going to zoom in a little more closely, just looking at how those ideas are expressed in language.

In other words, this is where you get to think about how your words are working—making sure that they mean what you intend and match the overall tone you want. Editing is also where you assess how your transitions connect ideas in sentences and paragraphs to create a smooth flow of ideas.

During this stage, you'll want to check that your essay has all the elements of style:

- Clarity of ideas
- Precise language
- Effective word choice
- Sentence variety
- Complete sentences

More specifically, you might:

- Look to see if you're repeating your ideas or including redundant information.
- Replace any words that are vague or imprecise with stronger ones that strike the right tone and create vivid impressions.
- Add in or change up your transitions so that you're connecting ideas into sentences and paragraphs intelligently and clearly.
- Check that all of your sentences are complete and that you use a variety of sentence lengths and structures.



TERM TO KNOW

Editing

The act of improving the sentence construction, word choice, and the overall style of an essay or other piece of writing.

5. Purpose of Proofreading

You've now got to do a final check to make sure that everything in your essay is where and how it should be. **Proofreading** is where you zoom in your closest to check for the smallest errors in grammar and mechanics.

This is separate from revising and editing, because this is where you're making sure that your text is ready for primetime. You're not adding anything new or fundamentally changing the way things are expressed; you're just making sure everything is clean and correct.

Again, remember that writing is a process, not a product. Thus, you might notice something to revise or edit while you're proofreading, and that's fine. Go ahead and fix any issues that you notice, but do focus on the small nitty-gritty details of grammar and mechanics.

When you proofread, you should look for:

- Typographical errors (which are usually called typos)
- Grammatical errors, such as shifts in verb tense or errors in plurality or pronoun agreement
- Spelling errors
- Punctuation errors
- Capitalization errors
- Any other basic formatting concerns, such as indented paragraphs, double spacing, margins, or font type



HINT

One method of proofreading is to enlarge the font on your screen to at least 20 points so that you can see some errors that might have otherwise been hiding in the small print.

After proofreading, your essay is ready to be seen by the world.



Communication: Why Employers Care

Everything you write in your career will reflect your intelligence and professionalism—from the cover letter you submit when you apply to a job, to emails you write to your supervisor and colleagues, to formal documents you write for stakeholders. You will want to make sure your writing is clear, cohesive, engaging, and error-free. This will show your professionalism and make you an asset to your employer because it proves that you have strong communication skills.



TERM TO KNOW

Proofreading

The act of fixing errors in grammar, mechanics, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, commonly confused words, and formatting in an essay or other piece of writing.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that after you finish drafting your essay, the **final stages of the writing process** are revising, editing, and proofreading. While these steps may sound the same, they each have a separate purpose.

The **purpose of revising** is to think about the big picture of your arguments by assessing your overall argumentation, support, evidence, and assertions. It is important to recognize your own limitations and get **feedback** from members of your target audience, from experts, and from people who are sensitive to the topic and can help identify bias or unintended connotations.

The **purpose of editing** is to look at how your ideas are expressed in language by evaluating whether your words are working the way you intend.

The **purpose of proofreading** is to make sure everything is clean and correct by focusing on small details of grammar and mechanics. Once you've completed these steps, your essay is ready for your readers. Finally, you discovered how the final stages of the writing process strengthen your communication skill.

Best of luck in your learning!

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TERMS TO KNOW

Editing

The act of improving the sentence construction, word choice, and the overall style of an essay or other piece of writing.

Proofreading

The act of fixing errors in grammar, mechanics, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, commonly confused words, and formatting in an essay or other piece of writing.

Revising

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