

Revising for Clarity and Focus

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WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial describes how to revise for clarity and focus. It considers two primary aspects of this type of revision: revising for content, and for the rhetorical situation. It includes an example to demonstrate the revision process.

This tutorial investigates revision for clarity and focus in three parts:

1. Revising for Content
2. Revision for the Rhetorical Situation
3. Revision: Example

1. Revising for Content

Revision is the process of re-visioning and rethinking an essay, including its structure, ideas, and support. *All* of the components of an essay must support its thesis. Following are key strategies for improving the clarity and focus of the thesis and content.

Ask questions of the thesis. Begin by reading your essay and asking yourself whether you still agree with your thesis. Next, ask whether your thesis expresses your point effectively and concisely. It's not uncommon for writers to change their views while writing drafts, so consider what you've written and make sure it's in line with your current thinking.

Ask questions of the body paragraphs. When you're satisfied that your thesis is on track, review each body paragraph and ask whether or not it supports your thesis. Also ask whether each body paragraph addresses only one topic. Should any of the content be removed (even if it is interesting and/or tangentially-related to the topic)? You should also ask the following questions about the structure of each of the body paragraphs:

- Does the paragraph have a strong topic sentence?
- Are the ideas clear?
- Does it contain necessary transitions between sentences, points, ideas, and support?

Re-examine the body paragraphs, and ask if there are other points that should be made to strengthen them (e.g., to make them more interesting to readers).

Ask questions of the evidence. Consider your evidence: Have you included enough of it to support the topic

of each paragraph? Is better evidence available that you can (and should) use? If you've cited sources to support your work, have you represented them fairly and accurately?

Ask questions of the introduction. Does the introduction to your essay present your thesis clearly and completely? Is it engaging enough to encourage readers to keep reading?



The introduction often needs to be changed during revision for clarity and focus. This is especially true when the introduction was written first. It's difficult (sometimes impossible) to write an effective introduction *before* you've written a complete draft. Therefore, it's a good idea to begin with a "skeleton" introduction: one that can be written quickly to provide a starting point for your first draft. It can be expanded as you develop your essay.

Ask questions of the conclusion. Ask whether or how well your conclusion sums up your argument. If there's anything you should add or change to make it more interesting, now is the time to do so!

2. Revising and the Rhetorical Situation

When revising, it's important for writers to consider the rhetorical situation in which they write. Following are some questions to ask of your essay at this point in the revision process:

- What is the purpose of this essay? Does this draft fulfill it? If it does not, what should I add or change so that it will do so?
- Who is the intended audience of this essay? Has this essay been written to appeal to or convince it? If it has not, what should be added or changed so that it will do so?
- Does the essay contain bias or unstated assumptions? If so, should it be identified to readers, or should the essay be adjusted to make it less-biased or to clarify assumptions?

3. Revision: Example

Following is an example of an introductory paragraph that is unclear and unfocused:

Some people say that the reason the U.S. is hated in the Middle East is our soldiers on the ground. Drone attacks come from a blue sky and strike anywhere. At least, that's what it must seem like for those living in targeted cities and villages. The real problem behind U.S. involvement in the Middle East is that no matter what else we do, if children are afraid to look up in the sky because there might be an unmanned aircraft full of missiles hanging somewhere up there, invisible and silent, this will always be what people think of when they hear the word America. That makes me sad.

Here is a new version of the paragraph, after the revision questions described in the previous question have been asked, and revisions based on answers to those questions have been made. The portions presented in **bold** will be discussed below.

There was a time when the people of the Middle East, upon hearing the word "America," would immediately picture an armed soldier. This is no longer the case, as we have given them something new to fear. There is a new face of American war in the Middle East: drones. Drone attacks come from a blue sky and strike anywhere. At least that's how it must seem to those living in targeted cities and villages. **As a congressional committee learned at a meeting in July**, the real problem behind U.S. involvement in the Middle East is that no matter what else we do, if children are afraid to look at the sky because there might be an unmanned aircraft full of missiles up there, invisible and silent, this is what people will think of when they hear the word "America" **(C-SPAN)**. **Until we change the policy that enables U.S. forces to attack anyone they suspect of being an "enemy," we will never be anything but cowards in the eyes of the people we claim to protect.**

The first thing the writer noticed when asking questions about this paragraph is that the first sentences were not engaging. They introduced the argument adequately (i.e., that soldiers are what people think of when they hear "America") but he or she decided to enhance suspense by changing the first sentences. The revised introduction engages readers and states the topic clearly: drone attacks are the new face of war.

When asking questions of the evidence (which was a weakness in this part of the draft) the writer decided to add a reference to one of the sources (i.e., a CSPAN report on a congressional committee meeting). Although this source is quoted later in the essay, he or she decides to cite it in the introduction to inform readers that the writer is not the only one who has made conclusions about drone warfare.

The writer also changed the ending of the paragraph because it had two problems:

1. The sentence did not state the thesis clearly, but only implied it.
2. The sentence wasn't in line with the purpose and intended audience.

Suppose the writer wants to post this essay on a political news and opinion site. He or she knows that the audience of that site is primarily people who oppose the "War on Terror," and who have read other articles that criticize it. Should the writer worry about offending anyone? Probably not. The new end to this paragraph, which states the thesis in uncompromising terms, works better with the purpose, and for the intended audience.



SUMMARY

This tutorial examined revising for clarity and focus. Questions about an essay's content, and the rhetorical situation in which it was written, are asked to gain information that will improve it. Answers to some of these questions were used to revise a sample introduction for clarity and focus.

Source: Adapted from Sophia Instructor Gavin McCall