

Revising for Structure, Focus, and Clarity

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the revision process and the most important areas to focus on when revising. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Revising for Clarity and Focus

1a. Asking Questions of the Thesis

1b. Asking Questions of the Body Paragraphs

1c. Asking Questions of the Introduction and Conclusion

2. Revising for Organizational Structure

2a. Cutting, Adding, and Moving

1. Revising for Clarity and Focus

Remember that **revising** 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, so the following are key strategies for improving the clarity and focus of each section of the essay.



TERM TO KNOW

Revising

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

1a. Asking 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.

1b. Asking 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 and addresses only one topic. Consider whether any of the content can be removed (even if it is interesting and/or somewhat 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?

Finally, re-examine the body paragraphs with your supporting sentences in mind, and ask if there are other points that should be made to strengthen them:

- Have you included enough evidence to support the topic of each paragraph?
- Is there 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?

1c. Asking Questions of the Introduction and Conclusion

When revising your introduction, ask the following questions:

- Does it present your thesis clearly and completely?
- Is it engaging enough to encourage readers to keep reading?

Then, 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 for Organizational Structure

The revising stage is also a good time for writers to ask questions about the organization of their work, including whether or not ideas flow smoothly and logically from one to the next.

This is not just a matter of using transitions but also involves considerations like whether ideas are presented in a more-complex-to-less-complex order, or vice versa. Writers should also ask whether each idea belongs in the essay, and if additional ideas should be added.

2a. Cutting, Adding, and Moving

Thankfully, word processing applications enable writers to easily manipulate text (words, sentences, and paragraphs) to improve the organization of a written work. You can add content (e.g., to provide additional support for the thesis), or remove it when necessary. Any amount of text can be added, deleted, or moved, depending on what's needed to improve your draft.

To illustrate this, consider the following paragraphs from a sample essay and how they could be improved through cutting, adding, and moving text:

Thesis statement: *The decrease in manners in the United States poses societal concerns, and focus should be placed on improving manners.*

Body paragraph 1: *Manners and politeness are being replaced with rude, hostile, and even uncivil behaviors across the country. The decrease in manners is not just the perception of a few overly sensitive Americans; it is a perception shared by many. Because perception is our own reality, the perception that manners have decreased means that they most likely have, in fact, decreased.*

Body paragraph 2: *Society, as a whole, may suffer the consequences of the decrease in manners. Americans perceive that manners have gotten worse in recent years. A survey conducted by Good Housekeeping magazine demonstrates that 79% of people are ruder to each other now than they were just 10 years ago. An additional 42% of respondents agree that they encounter rude behavior on a daily basis (Good Housekeeping, 2002). This study is more than 12 years old, which means that the problem has likely worsened since the time these results were collected. With 42% of Americans experiencing rudeness on a daily basis, the consequences of rude behavior are plaguing society.*

Notice that the supporting sentences in body paragraph 2 don't quite match the topic sentence. The topic of that paragraph is "the consequences of the decrease in manners," but the supporting sentences discuss the perception that manners are decreasing. Because this doesn't match the topic sentence or main idea of the paragraph, we'd need to remove the supporting sentences.

We can then see that body paragraph 1 discusses the perception that manners are decreasing. Revisiting that body paragraph, it is clearly lacking in strong supporting sentences. This might be a great place to move those supporting sentences from body paragraph 2 that were about the perception of a lack of manners:

Manners and politeness are being replaced with rude, hostile, and even uncivil behaviors across the country. Americans perceive that manners have gotten worse in recent years. A survey conducted by Good Housekeeping magazine demonstrates that 79% of people are ruder to each other now than they were just 10 years ago. An additional 42% of respondents agree that they encounter rude behavior on a daily basis (Good Housekeeping, 2002). This study is more than 12 years old, which means that the problem has likely worsened since the time these results were collected. The decrease in manners is not just the perception of a few overly sensitive Americans; it is a perception shared by many. Because perception is our own reality, the perception that manners have decreased means that they most likely have, in fact, decreased.

Now that we have moved the supporting sentences out of body paragraph 2, we need to replace them with something so that the paragraph itself is supported. We can include some interesting statistics about the effects

of a lack of manners in the workplace to support the paragraph's topic (the consequences of rude behavior). Note that the paragraph's concluding sentence has also changed as a result of this new supporting material:

Society, as a whole, may suffer the consequences of the decrease in manners. Recent studies shed light on the nature of the problem of rudeness, specifically in the workplace. In one study, 34% of survey respondents admitted to suffering from insomnia due to a stress and anger-filled workplace. Additionally, almost one quarter of respondents said that they have quit a job due to the rude and hostile climate of the workplace (RudeBusters.com, 2010). In the workplace, rudeness on a daily basis causes concerning problems for individuals.

This example demonstrates the ways in which adding, cutting, and moving ideas around can strengthen the organization of your writing.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you examined several important areas of revision that you will need to pay attention to when revising an essay. **Revising for clarity and focus** involves assessing an essay's content by **asking questions of the thesis, asking questions of the body paragraphs, and asking questions of the introduction and conclusion** to gain information that will improve these sections.

You also learned that **revising for organizational structure** allows you to assess the effectiveness of the way your essay is put together to determine whether your ideas are sequenced logically. When writing electronically, **cutting, adding, and moving** content is a simple way to approach this type of revision.

Best of luck in your learning!

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TERMS TO KNOW

Revising

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