

## How to Proofread and Revise Your Papers

Proofreading for revising (an approach many experienced writers use) involves re-reading and re-thinking. It can involve role-playing, either by playing the role of your audience (the skeptical teacher-reader) or by playing the "dumb" reader, one who simply refuses to understand at first. Playing the role of a reader helps you to remember that writing, unlike conversation, does not provide the reader with an opportunity for clarification or restatement, that you have to provide them in the paper from the first.

Proofreading for revising demands that

- You re-read the text carefully, slowly, closely, as you might read a textbook when studying for an exam.
- You play the role of a reader rather than the writer.
- You have some specific strategies to help you examine the draft in order to identify problems, to evaluate what's wrong, and to come up with and select alternative solutions.

### Strategies for Revising for Thesis/Focus

#### Getting Ready

Re-read the paper, attempting to locate your thesis statement (central proposition, main assertion, or point). Write this on another piece of paper. If your thesis isn't directly stated, write down a possible thesis from what you've read in your paper. On the same sheet, write down what you want this paper to do, specifically: what you want the reader to think or feel while reading the paper, or what you're trying to show in the paper. This statement of purpose probably won't appear in your paper; you're writing it down to keep it in mind as you make some choices.

Next, read each paragraph, attempting to determine the central idea of each. Try to capture each paragraph in a phrase or two presenting what the paragraph says and what the paragraph does. Be specific as possible. If you cannot decide on one phrase, list two or three options. (This little paragraph title is called a gloss.) As you work, list the glosses in order underneath your thesis statement.

#### Getting an overview

Consider the relationship between the thesis and your paragraph glosses on your sheet. Now you have to make some choices and decisions. Do the ideas of your paragraphs clearly connect to the thesis you wrote down? If not, should you re-write the thesis or eliminate the paragraph? Are the paragraphs in an order that allows a new reader to follow your development, or might another order work better? Are there duplicate or near duplicate ideas in different paragraphs?

- Does what you're saying in the paper line up with what you do in the paper?
- Does what you do in the paper support what you say?

## Matching the Assignment

Is what you're saying and doing appropriate to the assignment and class?

- Check the assignment again, looking for key terms such as *explain*, *describe*, *compare*, *analyze*, and so on. Does what you're doing meet the terms of the assignment?
- Consider the level of formality you're using. Is it appropriate to the class and assignment? Or is it too stuffy or too casual?

## Strategies for Revising for Order and Development

Consider the order of your paragraphs using the glosses. Is there any place where you drifted off the main track for a while and returned to it later?

Check your glosses for what you're doing in each paragraph. Then look at the paragraph itself, considering only the material in that paragraph. What does that paragraph offer to support the phrase you used to describe it in your gloss? Note all the detail, examples, and explanations. Is all this material related enough to be in the same paragraph? Should some of it be in another paragraph?

- Might a paragraph benefit from examples? From more explanation?
- Might it benefit from cutting some examples or explanation?
- Do your examples clearly connect to or support what the paragraph says?

## Strategy for revising for overall coherence ("flow")

Look at the transitional ideas between paragraphs. Sometimes, transitions are words or phrases; just as often, they are whole sentences that connect ideas. Decide if you need

- to make the transition more explicit
- to create new transitions where none existed
- to re-arrange the order of your paragraphs to make a transition possible.

Check to see if your transitions are all the same kind. Repeated use of "Also," "As well," or "The next aspect is" should set off an alarm. They suggest that you're making a list and that the draft needs more development. This is the time to decide where might need to add paragraphs that go into more detail about a point.

## Repeat as necessary

Notice that while proofreading for revising you might spot a difficulty that sends you back to the beginning of the proofreading process. You might expect that. It doesn't mean you've made a mistake but that you're getting good at making choices. Revising is circular, recursive. Making a change at one place in the draft sends ripples through the entire draft. A writer with flexible strategies is sensitive to the changes and builds on them.