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# THE JOY OF CHECKS: THE TIMELESS ART OF REVISION

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The majority of student or novice writers, in contrast to professional or expert ones, do not spend time revising, or if they do, tend to focus on “surface” concerns surrounding grammar and spelling. Revision is, for experienced writers, about so much more than that. It takes into account many questions that act as ways to improve writing, to make it more effective. Revising most often involves major structural changes and vast reworking, reordering, and rewriting of preliminary drafts. This handout is designed to help you to understand not only how to revise, but why it is important to do so, and offers suggestions for questions to ask of each and every piece of writing you undertake.

In most cases, you are revising for an academic reader—the academic community of which you are a part values critical thought that is demonstrated in writing through the following:

*Defining*: explaining key terms and ideas you are using in your writing

*Summarizing*: reporting accurately and economically other writers’ ideas, incorporating summary into your own writing and responding to others’ summarized ideas

*Analyzing*: separating others’ ideas or arguments into parts and critically examining those parts

*Synthesizing*: combining ideas, concepts, and examples to create new ideas or insight

*Organizing*: arranging thinking in a form that will communicate your ideas to a reader

When you revise, try to keep in mind the following:

- 1) **shape your meaning**: shaping your meaning might best be characterized by a notion of tuning what you wish to say, making clear the position you are taking or the argument you are constructing.
- 2) **craft your language**: the manner in which you craft your language will depend on the audience for whom you are writing. This is why it is so important to understand your audiences’ expectations. In academic writing, this usually refers to conventions such as not using “conversational” language, referring to the author of a book by her/his last name, etc.
- 3) **eliminate mistakes in grammar and usage**: this is usually the final step (not the only one) before handing in an essay. It helps to read your essay aloud to a friend or family member (pet works too). You may find that it is easier to catch your mistakes when you read your work from the page rather than your head.

The questions listed below are designed to help you shape your meaning, craft your language and eliminate mistakes in grammar and usage. Professional, expert readers ask these questions, or ones like them, every time they revise a piece of writing. If you get in the habit of thinking about your work in these ways, you will find revising to be a rewarding, satisfying experience that will make your writing more effective.

*Considering the essay as a whole:*

- Does the main point of my writing emerge clearly?
- Does my essay stick to the topic?
- Have I given my reader the information s/he needs in order to follow me?
- Where might my reader be confused or require further information?
- Have I remembered my audiences' needs and expectations?
- Have I provided evidence for the claims I have made?

*Considering the essay in terms of individual paragraphs and sentences:*

- Is the title of my essay on topic?
- Does the introduction provide my reader with a clear sense of what the essay is about?
- Does it capture my reader's interest?
- Does it give my reader a guide as to how the essay will proceed?
- Have I arranged my information in the most logical order?
- Do each of my paragraphs relate to the main purpose of my writing?
- Is each paragraph developed, using specific examples to clarify my points or arguments?
- Is the point of view consistent?
- Does it shift from "you" to "I" or "one" to "we"?
- Have I crafted my language so my reader will understand it?
- Defined difficult terms? Eliminated or explained jargon? Clarified personal references and abstract words?
- Does my conclusion give my reader a sense of closure or completion?
- Have I proofread for missing words, typing errors, grammatical or punctuation errors that might confuse my reader?