Revision & Editing: What's the difference?

Once you've drafted an essay or other piece of writing, you know you're not done; there are changes to be made. But what kind? How much? In what order?

REVISION: "Seeing again"

Most writers would agree that the most important aspects of successful writing is *revision*. When you revise, you work to "re-see" the writing to determine how well it is working and what is needed to strengthen it. Revision involves making big changes to the piece of writing as a whole–changes that focus on the focus, organization, development, and coherence. Working through revision changes very oftens help the writer better understand the material they are writing about.

Revision is at the heart of the writing process. It is NOT correcting errors, checking spelling, or making very minor changes.

When you revise,

- make *any changes necessary* to ensure the essay does what the assignment asks for

- make changes that help the essay's body **develop** (or "match") its thesis:
    - **delete** material that is off-track or is excess detail
    - **add** material that is missing or that is needed for development (new points OR details to develop the points already there, additional source support to strengthen the discussion, etc.)
    - **revise the thesis** to better reflect the essay's actual content

- **reorganize** material within paragraphs and/or **reorganize the order of paragraphs** to improve the paper's coherence and logical development

- add or improve **topic sentences,** or move misplaced ones into better position

- double- and triple-check that the **thesis** follows the "rules": asserts the focus or main point of the paper and
    - does not simply "announce" what the paper will do
    - avoids 1st person (unless appropriate to the assignment)
    - is <u>not</u> a question
    - is <u>not</u> merely a statement of fact.

> *For help with all of this, see our Writing Guides "Topic sentences & Writing effective paragraphs," "Tesis statements in college essays," and "Strategies for Revision."*

Once you are satisfied with your revision, it's time to move on to EDITING.

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EDITING: Working with words

Editing involves making changes at the sentence level to improve **correctness, clarity, and concision.**

Correctness: When you edit,
- pay special attention to finding and correcting **fragments, comma splices,** and **run-ons** (fused sentences). These "sentence crimes" are common and create lots of trouble for writers. *(See our Writing Guide "Sentence crimes: Identifying and correcting fragments, comma splices, and run-ons.")*
- check for correct use of **easily confused words,** like there/their/they're, its/it's, etc. *(See our Writing Guide "Editing: Words often confused.")*
- double-check the spelling of **possessives** and **plurals**–which should have an apostrophe? Which shouldn't?
- look for and correct any **colloquial spellings**–e.g., change "gonna" to the correct "going to," etc.
- double-check **capitalization!** Autocorrect has led to many people forgetting to capitalize properly!
- edit out **first and second person** if the writing is a formal essay (unless the assignment specifically requires or allows for them). *(See our Writing Guide "Academic style: Tone, diction, etc.")*
- **spell-check** often, and double-check a dictionary for the spelling of any questionable words.

Clarity & Concision: When you edit,
- change **passive voice** to **active,** unless passive is appropriate. *(See our Writing Guide "Editing: Active & passive voice.")*
- trim or rewrite sentences that are **too wordy, too long, or "twisted up"**—even if they are grammatically sound. Be brutal! And if you know you tend to be wordy, edit for this early in the writing process–you might think you've met a word or page requirement, only to discover when you edit that a lot of the words need to go! *(See our Writing Guide "Wordiness: Editing for concision.")*
- delete or rephrase **rhetorical questions.** These are questions for which an answer is either not expected or is implied. They're used for emphasis or to suggest an obvious answer, and writers often try to use rhetorical questions at transition points. These aren't effective in most academic writing, however; we want fully developed arguments and clear presentation of ideas at transition points! *(See our Writing Guide "Rhetorical questions: We want answers!")*
- reduce **nominalizations**–places where verbs have been turned into nouns, which requires additional words to be grammatical correct. Example: "The commanders **made a decision** (decided) that all personnel **should have a discussion about** (should discuss) the problem. *(See our Writing Guide "Nominalizations: "Zombie nouns.")*
- check to be sure ideas aren't being **repeated** in successive sentences. Sometimes we're trying to develop the idea, but end up saying the same thing in a different way. *(In this case, you'll want to do some revision by adding effective development in place of the repeated ideas.)*
- ***NOTE:*** *If your writing includes documentation of sources, be sure to edit the bibliography entries and the citations to make sure they are correct– See our documentation Writing Guides for help!*

Finally....

… **PROOFREAD** before considering your work finished. Remember to check your writing against the course style sheet, if there is one! *(For helpful strategies, see our Writing Guide "Proofreading: The final polish.")*

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