Editing & Revision Strategies

Graduate Resource Center

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Revision: Three(ish) Stages

Zero draft + First draft (fairly readable) = Revised draft
Topics to be covered...

- Difference between Editing & Revision
- Problems, Challenges, Politics of Revision
- Basic Strategy
- Specific Editorial Suggestions
- ELL/ESL Concerns
What’s the difference?
Differences Between Editing & Revising

- Editing: Correcting mistakes in writing like spelling errors, punctuation mistakes, incorrect words, sentence fragments, and other mechanical problems. The editing process focuses on grammar.

- Revising: Focusing on flow, organization, focus, fit. The revision process is targeted at making the paper sound good and make sense.
Problems, Challenges, Politics of Revision
Common Problems with Editing/Revision

- Too much revision means I didn’t have a good first draft
- I don’t want to lose what I have written
- I don’t have anything more to say
- Revision is going to interfere with the originality of my work
- Revision is basically about what others want to see in my work
Major Challenges

- You have to transition from being a writer to a reader
- Revision requires time and effort and, above all, PATIENCE
- Revising drafts can be confusing when you have conflicting feedback
- Revisions can leave you diffident
The Politics of Revision

- Don’t blindly follow your committee’s feedback. It should make sense to you.
- Think independently.
- If you choose to not include an idea that a committee member has asked you to add to the draft, then state the reason(s).
- Do not get defensive. Rather, think about whether a particular addition/deletion will add value to your work.
Basic Strategy for Editing/Revision
Where to start?

- Follow feedback, particularly from those you trust and admire
- Prioritize what needs attention and in what order. For example, organization OR ideas, editing adjectives OR cutting chapter length
- Do not start revising in the middle of a chapter
How to go about it?

- Always have a plan
- Identify one work at a time. In other words, break revision into smaller, manageable units/tasks (For ex., one chapter at a time)
- Allow time between drafts
- Save introduction and conclusion for last
Share

- Find readers who want to see you succeed and who believe in your abilities as a conscientious thinker.
- Get comfortable sharing your work at various stages of the writing process.
- Ask your readers for particular kinds of feedback.
- Join a community of readers/writers. The GRC is a great resource.
Organize

- Reverse outline your chapter. Errors will stand out.
- Use the reverse outline on all scales.
- Look at macro issues before you attend to individual sentences.
- Use subheadings for better organization.
- Remember that grammatical issues are relatively easy to address.
Revise

- Theses/Dissertations are organizational nightmares. Don’t get disheartened.
- Is your work structured into discrete units/chapters? Why or why not?
- Transitions from one chapter to another are hard. Pay special attention.
- Look for ideas that repeat themselves in different chapters. Is this alright?
Rule of Three

For each scale of the work, there should be three general parts.

- **Intro**: States what is to follow
- **Body**: Details of the work
- **Conclusion**: Summary, Concluding points, transition to next section.
Edit

- Less is more
- Use your ears
  - Read aloud to catch errors
- Use your eyes
  - Edit any paragraph that runs an entire page or more
- Use your breath
  - Good way to double check your punctuation
Edit

- Watch out for your favorite writing errors.
- Keep a dictionary/thesaurus handy (but use them correctly...)
- Don’t hesitate to get professional help.
Some specific suggestions
Specific Editorial Suggestions

- Use nouns and verbs over adverbs and adjectives
- Stick to the subject-verb-object format as much as possible
- Subjects and objects should be identifiable
- Pay special attention to tense, subject-verb agreement, and subject-possessive agreement.
Specific Editorial Suggestions

Avoid weak verbs

The most common weak verbs are “to be” and “have.” Replace them with interesting ones. Ex: Instead of “He is planning to have a party at his house this weekend” use “He plans to host a party this weekend.” Replace “She wants to be at the party” to “She wants to attend the party.”

Use active verbs over passive ones

Ex: Change “She was hit by the car” to “The car hit her”

Stick to simple present and past tense

Do not start sentences with “There is” or “There are”

Ex: Change “There are many weak verbs in this line” to “This line has many weak verbs” or “This line is replete with weak verbs”
Specific Editorial Suggestions

- Avoid passive voice
- Identify the actor, action, and the acted and use them in subject-verb-object order
- You need to take a relook at your sentence if it ends with “by the.”

Ex. “The house was damaged by the rainstorm” should be replaced with “The rainstorm damaged the house.”
ESL/ELL Concerns in Editing/Revision
ESL/ELL Concerns

- If you are unfamiliar with a particular writing style or genre, find examples and use them as models.
- Be sure to review the style manual for your discipline.
- Dictionary/Thesaurus are your best friend.
ESL/ELL Concerns

- Make a list of your most common errors/mistakes
- Prioritize them and work through each one-by-one
- In general, prioritize grammar/language if it gets in the way of your reader being able to understand the message of your writing
- See handout for a quick cheat sheet on some common problems
Summary of Basic Points
Some Basic Points

- Get organized and prioritize
- Focus on macro issues first and then narrow down to individual sentences and words
- Get familiar with your most common errors
- Don’t be afraid to ask for help but do not take advise uncritically.
Thank You!
Questions?

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