

Writing is Revising

Part 2: How to Revise

Revising ≠ **Editing**: When most people talk about writing, they usually use “revising” and “editing” as synonyms. They aren’t.

Editing: Fixing grammar, punctuation, citations, deleting unnecessary words, and so on. These are small-scale changes and corrections that “polish” the final product, and so it should be the last thing you do before printing your essay.

Revising: Literally, revising means to “re-vision” a piece of writing. When you revise something, you take a critical look at it and determine what substantial pieces you need to add (or delete), what paragraphs or sentences need to be moved, what evidence needs to be added or explained, and so on.

Bottom line: Revising = large scale changes done to improve the overall quality of the essay.
Editing = small-scale changes done to polish the essay.

So how should you go about revising a piece of writing? With practice, you’ll develop your own unique style based on what works for you, but here is my method, which has seen me through many college and graduate school essays.

Step 1: Once you have a draft completed, **print it out**. (Some people can revise on their laptop or computer; I can’t. I need to see the paper in front of me.)

Step 2: **Read the whole thing** with a pen in your hand, marking areas that need any kind of improvement. I draw big circles and stars to flag areas that need work. I write myself notes (like, “What the hell am I trying to say here? Need to clarify this!). And I start making corrections on the paper.

Step 3: Now I open up the laptop and **work on all the areas I flagged**. This involves re-writing sentences and paragraphs, moving pieces to more logical place in the essay, and generally making a mess of things. It’s okay to make a mess – trust yourself. You’ll have time to clean it up later because you planned backwards to schedule plenty of revision time, right?

Step 4: **Rinse, repeat**. Congratulations! You’ve completed one round of revision. Now do it again. And again. I typically repeat this process between three to four times, depending on the length of the final product. I’m not a naturally talented writer, so I had to work hard to make my writing as good as it could be. **Remember: Effective writing is always the product of multiple revisions, so schedule revision time into every writing project.**