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# Revising an Academic Essay

Revision is an essential part of the essay writing process. Often we don't figure out what it is we are really trying to say until we write our conclusions. To revise well, we take a step back, assess all of the points we are making, and think about how they build on one another and what they all add up to. Rather than handing in essays you aren't truly satisfied with, build time for revision into your schedule. Setting an earlier deadline for a draft can help, as can writing a draft that gets your ideas on the page but is not yet polished. If you wait to polish your prose until after you have reconsidered your ideas, you will have time to discover new insights and express them in a clear, coherent, and powerful way.

## Paper-level revisions

Focus on the overall presentation of your argument.

- Re-consider the strength of your main point or claim (your thesis). Is it specific, original, and contestable?
- Examine how the paper fulfills and maintains the expectations established by the thesis. Evaluate the contribution of every paragraph.
- Assess the amount of supporting evidence for each main point.
- Consider how well you have dealt with counter-arguments or potentially conflicting evidence.

Techniques and strategies:

- Review the assignment prompt
- Put the paper away and fast-write: “what am I really trying to do in this paper?”
- Create a reverse outline
- Experiment with rewriting or refining your thesis
- Identify any counter-arguments and think about where and how you have addressed them

## Section- and Paragraph-level revisions

Consider unity, development, and coherence.

- Focus on the introduction. Does it set the stage for the entire paper and clearly state your full thesis?
- Assess the signposts (topic sentences), or bridge sentences of each section and each paragraph. Do they help your reader understand the significance of each new point of your central argument? Do they make your point explicit?
- Evaluate the effectiveness of your conclusion. Does it go beyond summary to synthesis and address the wider significance of your argument?

Techniques and strategies:

- Imagine you are someone else and read your essay “for the first time”
- Print out your essay and cut up the paragraphs like puzzle pieces.
- Use highlighters to identify signposts, transition points, and bridges. Can you follow the argument if you read only those?
- Use highlighters to see if key terms appear throughout the paper

## Word- and sentence-level revisions:

Aim for clarity and style.

- Have you adequately defined your key terms?
- Is each sentence as well written as it can be, without grammar or punctuation problems?
- Does your tone sound right for an academic essay in this course?
- Read all your quotations and paraphrases through once more. Are they accurate and properly cited?
- Have you introduced each of your quotations and discussed them all adequately in the context of the rest of your paper?

Techniques and strategies:

- Read your work aloud or use [Kurzweil](#).
- Read your paper backwards, sentence by sentence.
- Use the “[paramedic method](#).”

## General Tips

- Put your paper away for at least twenty-four hours before revising it.
- If possible, print out a draft, especially for final proofreading.
- While you work, have access to the assignment prompt, to the relevant texts or other material, and to reference works.

For further guidance on any of these techniques, [make a Writing Center appointment](#) at <https://amherst.mywconline.com/>.

Kurzweil is available to the Amherst College community through Academic Technology: <https://www.amherst.edu/offices/it/academic-technology-services/assistive-technology>

Learn more about Richard Lanham’s Paramedic Method with the Purdue OWL guide: [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/academic\\_writing/paramedic\\_method.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/paramedic_method.html)

This handout was developed by Emily Merriman, Kristen Brookes, and Cassie Sanchez and was last updated in September 2018.