

## A Rare Medium: Revising a Paper That is Finished, but not Well Done

There's an old saying that revision is a dish best served cold. Nevermind—they say that about revenge. Which brings us to a different subject: it is important to revise your work to make sure it says what you mean!

Revision is an involved process. You'll want to read your paper multiple times. Each time you read, concentrate on a different aspect. Begin by focusing your attention on big issues (such as argument and structure) and then small issues (such as punctuation). The following worksheet serves up some questions (and comments) to help guide your revision.

### **Step 1. Analyze the Argument**

- What is the argument of the paper?  
*The argument should explain how or why something happened, not just that something happened.*
- If you have multiple arguments, which is the best for the paper?
- Where is the argument stated?  
*The argument should be in the introduction, usually towards the end of the introduction. Check your conclusion to see if it contains a better expression of your paper's argument.*
- Is the argument supported throughout the paper?  
*Each paragraph should address some aspect of the overarching argument. If a paragraph does not support your argument, reframe that paragraph so it does.*
- Can you think of an argument that better matches the paper as it stands?  
*It is easier to change the argument to fit the paper rather than changing the paper to fit an argument.*

### **Step 2. Survey the Structure**

- Does the paper have a clear introduction, body, and conclusion?
- Do the paragraphs follow a logical order?
- Is there an important paragraph missing, such as an introduction or conclusion? Are there any body paragraphs missing?
- Is each paragraph devoted to a single idea or topic?  
*If paragraphs address multiple topics and arguments, break them up so they address only one.*
- Does each paragraph begin with an analytical or interpretative topic sentence?  
*Each paragraph should; descriptive sentences belong after the topic sentence.*

- Is the sentence that summarizes the point of the paragraph in the middle or end of the paragraph?  
*It should not be: move it up to the top, making it your topic sentence.*
- Do sentences within a paragraph follow a logical succession of ideas?  
*If not, re-arrange them accordingly or add a missing paragraph that links two ideas.*

**Step 3. Evaluate your Evidence**

- Are there free-standing quotations (i.e. sentences that begin and end with quotation marks)?  
*Quotations should be introduced. Who said it? Does the reader need to know when, where, and to whom the words were said? Also, explain why this quotation proves your point.*
- Does the paper use both paraphrases **and** quotations?
- Are the quotations effective and memorable?  
*If not, consider paraphrasing them.*
- Are the quotations accurate?  
*It is absolutely critical that the words are correct and reflect the author's original meaning.*
- Are the paraphrases and quotations used to support a claim?  
*Remember, evidence should be used to make an argument, not describe a historical situation.*

**Step 4. Style/Punctuation/Grammar/Spelling Checklist**

<input type="checkbox"/> Stapled	<input type="checkbox"/> Uses correct homonym (led/lead, their/there, where/wear)
<input type="checkbox"/> Has page numbers	<input type="checkbox"/> Avoids unnecessary repetition of words
<input type="checkbox"/> Avoids passive voice	<input type="checkbox"/> Has a title
<input type="checkbox"/> No contractions (didn't, wasn't, it's, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Avoids overly long paragraphs/sentences
<input type="checkbox"/> Uses past tense when discussing the past	<input type="checkbox"/> Cites sources using correct citation format
<input type="checkbox"/> Uses present tense when discussing historians and their work	<input type="checkbox"/> No fragments or comma splices
<input type="checkbox"/> Avoids generic male (he, him, mankind)	<input type="checkbox"/> Avoids colloquial language and slang