

CHAPTER 2 - THE WRITING PROCESS

By Calvin Olsen

Writing for academic audiences can be a daunting task for anyone. Sitting down to a blank page and having to fill it sometimes makes even the most experienced writers anxious. Ernest Hemingway said, “There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed.” Whatever your writing strengths or experiences, try not to let the *idea* of the writing task overwhelm you. Even famous writers, from novelists to journalists, don’t produce a perfect first draft. All writing, and academic writing in particular, is a process. This process involves steps, which range from coming up with ideas to ensuring that every single word fits precisely with your overall tone. This chapter will outline many of those stages as well as provide tips and strategies to help you maximize each stage’s potential to lead to the best possible final product.

Key Terms

- **Writing as a Process:** One difference between writing in high school and academic, university-level writing is the necessity of writing in multiple stages. You may be familiar with the process of making a “rough” draft, but the audience for your projects will now often include highly educated or specialized readers. So, engaging this audience will require careful attention to writing choices beyond the first draft. It’s also important that your writing process aligns with your learning and writing style.
- **Topic Selection:** Working to ensure your chosen or assigned topic is broad enough to understand and narrow enough to fit the required length will help you throughout the writing process. There is more to topic selection than choosing something that interests you, and the steps in this chapter will help as you sift through possibilities in search of a topic and an angle.
- **Prewriting:** Prewriting is the activity through which you organize your thoughts before writing and imagine the direction(s) your composition can take. This chapter overviews many prewriting activities that can help you generate valuable ideas to build on as foundation for the rest of your writing process.
- **Developing a Thesis:** A thesis is essentially a road map for your composition. A high school thesis told your reader precisely what things you would write about and in what order. An academic thesis, on the other hand, contains an overview and an argument. Rather than revealing the content of your paper, your thesis will create interest in your ideas.
- **Revision:** Revision is a large-scale undertaking that requires looking at your own work through the audience’s eyes. The goals of revision include: meeting the audience’s expectations, avoiding ambiguity, and creating a composition and is cohesive from beginning to end.

- **Editing:** Editing is the small-scale reviewing process you're likely used to from high school. Editing is not just for the last seconds of your writing process; careful attention to editing ensures that your audience does not "trip" on your language and dismiss your argument.
- **Collaborative Writing:** Many writers, especially in professional settings, work together on their compositions. Similarly, in your academic career, you will collaborate with professors and classmates in a variety of ways that will improve your writing and your ability to work effectively in a team. Too often dreaded, "group work" is often highly beneficial, not only because it provides an opportunity to engage with a small sample of your actual audience, but also because every pair of eyes looking over your composition can help focus your revision and editing.

Outcomes

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to...

1. Begin the writing process confidently by generating ideas for papers and projects.
2. Plan and outline assignments to ensure your paper remains clear to audiences.
3. Create drafts of a project that can be reviewed and strengthened.
4. Review (revise, edit, and proofread) your writing for clarity and brevity.
5. Use the writing process while working collaboratively.

Outcome 1: Generating Ideas

Invention

Once you've read the assignment, the writing process has started. Anything you do en route to choosing and researching your topic is a form of invention. Invention is essentially the formulation of the thoughts—by writing down ideas, talking with your peers, etc.—that lead to your writing process. Don't discount any ideas at this point!

Choosing Your Topic

Choosing a topic is the first concrete stage of writing. Some instructors will provide very specific topics, others leave the topic open, and others fall in the middle, letting you choose a topic within specific parameters. If you do have a choice, generate a list of possible topics, then ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this topic interesting to me?
- Is it narrow/broad enough to meet the assignment's length requirements?
- Do I have questions that need to be answered through research?
- Who is my intended audience, and why would they be interested in the topic?

Narrowing Your Topic

Ensuring that your topic is narrow enough is sometimes difficult, and often it's actually impossible to focus your ideas without writing through them a bit. Think about your assignment as a pet horse and your topic as the fence around its pasture: if the perimeter of the fence is too small, the horse will run out of grass to eat and starve; if the perimeter of the fence is too large, it will take forever to find the horse and you'll never get to ride it. For example, let's say your assignment is a five-page paper examining sonnets. You will probably struggle to write that much material on the first word of Shakespeare's Sonnet 130, because the fence around your topic would be too small. Likewise, you wouldn't be able to fit the entire history of the sonnet form into that length paper either, because the fence around your topic is too large.

The scope of your topic will depend on the assignment type and length, but here are a few questions to ask yourself that will help you begin to narrow your topic before you even start writing:

- What about this topic interests me, or what could potentially interest me?
- What do I already know about the topic, and what do I need to learn more about?
- How would I explain the topic to someone who had never heard of it at all?
- What questions do I have about the topic or the assignment that my instructor could answer in class?
- What information within the topic is common knowledge so I don't have to spend time explaining it?

More often than not, when you think your topic is narrow enough there is still more work to be done. It is very hard to come up with a topic that is *too* narrow.

Critical Questions

The questions provided above are examples of journalistic questions (*who, what, where, why, and how*), and you can come up with others that relate to your topic. However, critical questions go a bit farther by allowing you to approach your topic from different points of view, and the way you answer each question can determine what research you still need to do and/or how you might organize your paper.

You'll have more to say for some questions than others, but answering all of them (even the awkward ones) will help you think about a topic in new ways and make you aware of ideas you'll need to research and questions you'll need to answer in your paper.

Try answering all of the following questions. Then, after you've answered them, write a quick paragraph about what was easy to answer, what was difficult, and what type of information you would need to make the difficult questions easier to answer. Try:

- **Describing it.** What does it look like? Sound like? Taste like? Feel like? Smell like?
- **Defining it.** What is its dictionary definition? What group of things does it belong to? What are some examples of it? What are facts or statistics about it? What is it not?
- **Comparing and/or contrasting it.** How is it similar to or different from other topics?
- **Associating it.** What else does it make you think of? What have you heard people say about it?
- **Analyzing it.** What are the topic's components? What are its causes? Effects? Purpose?
- **Applying it.** What use does your topic have? What makes it possible or impossible? What are the costs? Who should be concerned?
- **Arguing for and against it.** Try to take a stand for both sides of the topic regardless of your own opinion.
- **Googling it.** What comes up first? What type of sources (popular, scientific, opinion, etc.) seem to cover the subject? Are there any surprising results? What showed up that you had expected? What didn't show up that you expected? Why do you think that is?

Prewriting

You can also continue narrowing your topic and generating ideas with prewriting.

Prewriting is exactly what it sounds like: exercises/writing you complete before writing a draft. Prewriting is a way of discovering the thoughts you may have about a subject. It can also help you condense and combine those thoughts until you have a specific concept or relationship to explore in the rest of the writing process. Prewriting will show you what you *do* know and—perhaps more importantly—reveal what you still *don't* know about a topic so you can make more informed decisions about how you want to proceed with your topic.

Even just having a few ideas down on paper can help you avoid procrastination and gain confidence, which can ultimately lead to a more successful composition. Whether you're overwhelmed by new and complicated information, worried that you won't understand or be understood, or just prone to last-minute writing, the following prewriting strategies should take some of the pressure off your first step.

Freewriting

Freewriting means putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard and writing whatever words, ideas, phrases, and/or questions come to mind without stopping to revise or proofread. To begin, find a quiet place and write the first thing that comes into your head, even if it's literally, "I don't know what I'm doing." Then write the next six or seven thoughts that pop into your head. When freewriting for an academic assignment, you might add parameters, such as only writing the ideas related to your topic. Even visualizing the words that make up your topic will get you started. In the 2010 film *Inception*, one character says, "Don't think about elephants. What are you thinking about?" and the other responds, "Elephants." Just having a word or idea in your head is a place to start, and freewriting is a way of teasing out and deepening the connection between what you think and what you still need to find out.

Looping

Looping is a way of analyzing and adding depth to your prewriting to help generate even more ideas.

Here are the main steps of looping:

1. After your original unstructured freewrite, look for a topic or theme that sticks out to you as interesting or in need of clarification.
2. Freewrite about that particular topic for five minutes. This is your first loop.
3. Reread this topic-based freewrite and try to identify the 'epicenter' or focal point of your ideas—the question, image, problem, or idea that seems the most interesting or promising (or broad if you just need something to write about next).
4. Write a sentence or two that summarizes your understanding of that thought: this sentence is the starting point for your next loop.
5. Repeat the process, freewriting for five minutes and identifying an epicenter as many times as you want or need.

As you make loops, don't worry about what the final product will look like. Always keep in mind that looping is prewriting, not drafting. So, allow yourself the time and space to discover and compare the ideas, thoughts, or opinions that show up. You will likely be able to use words, phrases, or even whole sentences in your draft, but the point at this stage is simply to get you thinking and writing.

Clustering

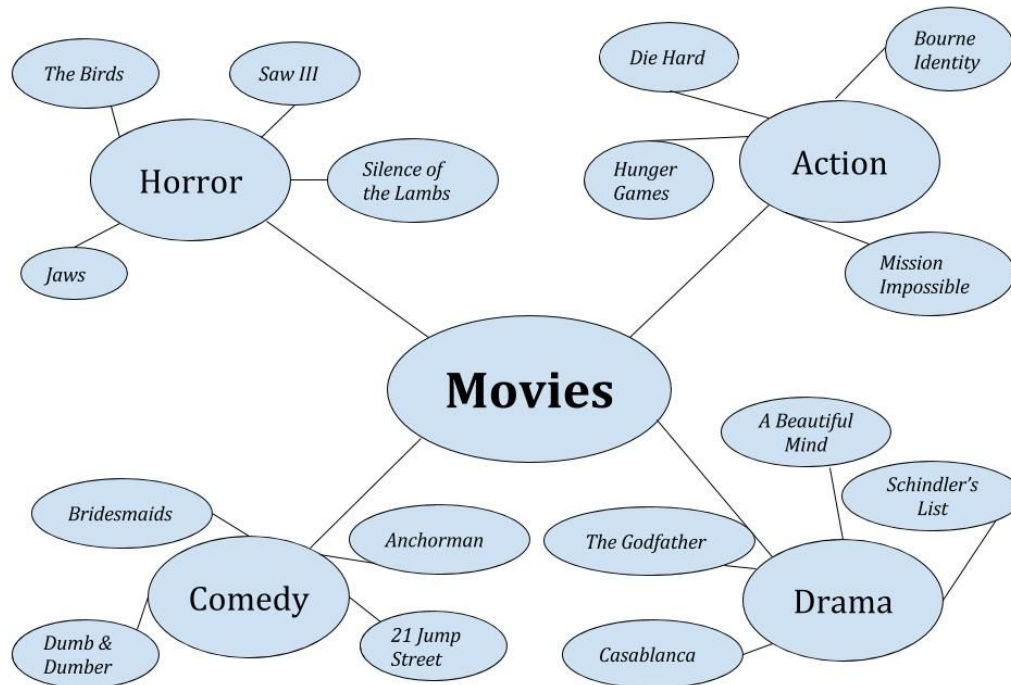
Clustering (and its variations, which have variety of names, including webbing and mapping) is a way of locating relationships between ideas. This strategy is especially helpful for visual learners.

Here are the main steps of clustering:

1. Write your main idea in the center of the page. Circle it.
2. Think up as many ideas as you can that relate to your main idea. As you think of them, write them on the page and circle them.
3. Draw a line connecting each one to the main idea.
4. Every time you come up with a new idea or thought that relates to one of those, write it close by the idea that inspired it, circle, and connect with a line.
5. Continue until each idea has as many related ideas connected to it that you can think of. The result should look like a web of clusters on your page.

Grab a pen and let's work through a quick example of clustering.

1. Write the word "Movies" in the center of the page and circle it.
2. In each of the four corners, write a type of movie (Horror, Action, Comedy, etc.) and circle each one.
3. Draw a line from the center circle to each of the four corner circles separately. Now go to each corner and write the titles of four movies that fit into the movie genre written in the corner. Circle all of them and connect them to the corner circle.



You now have the titles of sixteen separate films on the page, all of which fit under the broad category of movies and a sub-category. A paper about one or even a few of these films would be much more interesting than a paper about all movies in general.

You can apply this model to any topic of your choosing. It will help you narrow down broad concepts into more accessible, manageable topics. And remember, you can always come back and add more or narrow the ideas further as needed.

Helpful Resources for Prewriting

- “Brainstorming,” UNC Writing Center
 - Search: UNC Writing Center handouts
- “Invention: Starting the Writing Process,” Purdue OWL
 - Search: Purdue OWL invention

Exercise 2A: Freewriting

Try it out:

1. Set a timer for five minutes.
2. Start writing. It does not matter what you write, only that you write *something*.
3. Write everything that comes to your mind—don’t filter anything.

4. When time is up, take a two minute break and play a game on your phone.
5. Return to what you wrote and look for words, ideas, or connections that might be good places to start researching or writing more.
6. Repeat as many times as you want or need .

Outcome 2: Planning

Once you have a few prewriting activities under your belt, your topic and preliminary argument should start to feel like they are coming together for you. Even an early understanding of your topic and assignment can be enough to begin to move toward drafting a paper. The following are a few moves that will help you as you prepare a draft.

Outlining

Once you have some ideas for your composition, you can make an outline. An outline is a step-by-step plan. It helps with overall organization by grouping ideas together to create a framework, or skeleton, for the logical progression of the composition. Outlines can be formal or informal; some writers make bullet point outlines that group ideas together very quickly while others construct highly detailed outlines with the first sentence of each paragraph already written and quotes ready for use as they fill in the spaces between ideas. In any variation , though, the outline should represent the main ideas of the paper, in order, with corresponding sub-topics filed under their respective main ideas.

You can outline almost anything, so choose your favorite book or movie, and write a quick outline. For your main ideas, give broad plot points like you're telling the story to a friend in one minute; for your sub-topics, put the more nuanced details you might include if you had five minutes to tell the story. Here's a very basic example:

- There were three little pigs.
 - One had gone to Duke and built a house of straw.
 - One had gone to N.C. State and built a house of sticks.
 - One had gone to UNC and built a house of bricks.
- A wolf wanted to eat them.
 - The wolf was both big and bad.
 - The wolf had an above-average lung capacity.
 - The wolf was rather polite.
- The wolf came to town looking for dinner.
 - He blew down the house of straw.
 - Duke pig ran to the house of sticks.
 - He blew down the house of sticks.

- Duke pig and N.C. State pig ran to the house of bricks.
 - He did not blow down the house of bricks.
 - The house was too strong.
 - All three pigs were safe.
 - The wolf was not ready to call it a day.
- The pigs succeeded in scaring off the wolf.
 - The wolf was still hungry, and also overconfident.
 - The wolf climbed the house of bricks to go down the chimney.
 - The wolf landed in a fire, jumped out, and got on the next train out of town.

Notice that there are many details this outline leaves out, and there are details it could leave out and still be an outline. What you choose to include will vary based on factors such as your preferences, the assignment, the genre, how much research you need to manage, and how much time you have to devote to the activity. Also, outlining can be helpful at any point in the writing process (you can outline individual paragraphs, and even sentences) when you need to strategize about relationships between ideas and how to most effectively organize those ideas to highlight those relationships.

Developing a Working Thesis

A thesis is a claim or a statement that you propose to prove. In high school, chances are you were taught that a thesis is a concrete, three-part statement that explicitly states what your whole paper will say. While that's a solid foundation for generating a thesis, an academic thesis is more sophisticated and less restrictive. Consider the difference between these two theses:

1. Frankenstein's monster is not human because he was never born, he has a body made of other people's parts, and he is unable to feel cold.
2. Readers may argue that Frankenstein's monster is not human because he has no uniform genetic makeup. However, upon examination of his mental and emotional capacities it is obvious he can speak beautifully and reason both logically and ardently. Frankenstein's monster is, therefore, not only human—he is *more* human than Victor.

The first thesis is simply a list of observations. The second thesis provides a clear overview of what the paper will argue without relying on a “shopping list” of ideas. The thesis is a roadmap for where your paper will take your audience, but it doesn't need to list every single stop along the way.

There are many effective methods for generating an academic thesis, but Todd Taylor's XYZ model provides a basic formula you can follow to make a working thesis appropriate to almost any academic paper. The XYZ model has three parts:

- Common Ground: "Most people assume (x)."
- Disruption: "However, research has shown (y)."
- Claim: "In this paper I will add/argue/prove (z)."

The wording you finally settle on should be your own, but these three moves will help you generate a thesis you use to guide your drafting.

Research Questions

If you're having difficulty coming up with a thesis in the form of a statement, you can formulate your ideas in the form of a research question and work from there. For more information about research questions, see Chapter 3: Working with Sources.

Exercise 2B: Thesis Prewriting

To generate ideas that you can use to create a thesis with the XYZ model, respond to the following prompts:

- List three general ideas or observations that you have about your topic
- List three assumptions that you believe other readers might make about your topic
- List three ways in which your initial reading or research about the topic that might challenge these assumptions
- List three ideas that you might want to prove in your topic?

Now, using these options you generated, the XYZ approach outlined above to create a working thesis.

Outcome 3: Creating a Draft

Once you've created a working thesis and considered your organizational strategy, you're ready to write the first draft of your composition. It's important to remember that the purpose of your initial draft is to give you something to work with. Professional writers do not generate a final product as they go. In the academic and professional contexts, almost all polished and published pieces of writing are the result of multiple drafts. An early draft is by nature unfinished, so don't worry about anything other than trying to write what you can. There is no need to be critical of or worried about writing a draft—just fill the page and see where you get. Here are a few tips for creating a draft:

Gather Your Information

All the work you've done to this point should be accessible so you can use it. Even assignment sheets and prewriting activities can be resources to help with your first draft. You don't need to have researched extensively to write a draft, but if you have researched, have your primary and secondary sources close at hand.

Start Writing

Don't worry about opening with a mind-blowing sentence. Just write. Choose a time and a place with minimal distractions to begin writing. If you know what time of day you work best, set aside that time for writing.

Use Your Own Voice

There will be time during revisions to consider word choice and tone, so, during drafting, write in whatever voice makes you comfortable. In fact, the closer your writing mirrors your thinking the easier it will be to add, subtract, and modify content later. Even first-person pronouns and active verbs are perfectly fine early on (and, in most cases, later).

Follow Your Outline, but Be Flexible

Your outline is particularly important to your first draft because it reminds you what to say and in what order. And while you'll certainly want to address your outline's main points, it's also fine if certain sections of your outline get more attention than others. Also, don't feel constrained to write everything about one point before moving to another; don't be afraid to leave gaps in the paper and return later.

Leave It Alone

After you finish your draft, reward yourself by getting away from it for a while. If you can, leave it overnight. If you can't leave the draft overnight, at least take a break to do something unrelated and return. The longer you stay away from the draft the easier it will be to see it with "new eyes" when you return.

Exercise 2C: Just Do It

The only good way to learn to write a draft is to do it. You successfully completed substantial work to this point through prewriting and planning, so you have a solid foundation. Also, take some of the pressure off yourself: again, a first draft is not final; there will be more of them as the writing process moves forward. So get writing—the ceiling is the roof.

Outcome 4: Reviewing your Work

Revision vs. Editing vs. Proofreading

The final stages of the writing process, revision and editing, are themselves multi-faceted processes. To be truly effective, therefore, they require substantial time and careful planning. After the push to finish drafting, writers may feel tempted to hurry through these last stages of the writing process; however, revision and editing offer writers the opportunity to “re-see” their own work through the audience’s eyes and craft a document that fully meets this audience’s needs.

Novice writers often confuse or conflate revision and editing. Revision involves much more than changing a few words or correcting grammatical errors; it involves thinking carefully about how to strengthen an essay’s ideas and make the writing more effective. During revision, writers re-examine an entire paper and focus on higher-order concerns—such as thesis, audience, purpose, organization, unity, support, and source usage—that impact an essay on the paragraph or even global level. Editing, on the other hand, focuses on sentence-level concerns. These lower-order concerns include tone, sentence structure and variety, and word choice. That’s not to say that your favorite academic words—like *heretofore*, *consequently*, and *thus*—aren’t impressive; it just means they have to match the rest of your language so they don’t sound like filler.

To illustrate the value of revising before editing, consider the following metaphor: you have a new apartment, and the movers just dropped off all your furniture and boxes. You open up a box of room accessories—lamps, vases, collectables—and set them up all around the room. Then, you try move your furniture to where it belongs. In order to do this, though, you have to remove the accessories you just set up, put the furniture in its place, and replace the accessories. In this metaphor, revision is the furniture, and editing is the accessories. Any time you spend on editing before you revise is likely to be wasted.

Proofreading is different than both revision and editing. Proofreading, sometimes referred to as copyediting, is the act of polishing the paper into the best possible final product. Most proofreading is word-level, and takes on problems with spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other issues of “correctness,” all of which can affect the audience’s impression of your composition.

As with other stages of the writing process, revision, editing, and proofreading become stressful when writers try to complete the entire process all at once or in too short a time frame. Writers can minimize this stress not only by building time for these practices into

their writing schedules, but also by creating a detailed plan for revision, editing, and proofreading.

Revision Strategies

As you revise, always keep in mind that revision is a reexamination of an entire paper in order to focus on the higher-order concerns (thesis, audience, purpose, organization, unity, textual evidence/support, and source usage). Again, revision is much more than editing—it requires careful consideration of ways an essay’s ideas can be strengthened and to make the writing more effective and more engaging. The following strategies can help make your revisions even more efficient and effective:

Avoid Procrastination

Revision takes time. You might be able to perform a few basic edits the night before a paper is due, but attempting to revise without time to examine your writing fully is extremely stressful. Procrastination tends to be the biggest barrier to effective revision; there is little or no time to revise papers that are written at the last minute.

Use Feedback Provided by Your Instructor and Peers

Even if you have already reviewed and integrated draft workshop or instructor feedback from an earlier draft, review this feedback again for elements you may have missed or misunderstood on first review. If needed, ask your reviewers/instructor for clarification. Keep in mind, feedback your instructors give you is based on principle, meaning that just because they only identify an improvement area in one place in the paper doesn’t mean it’s the only instance. An issue that needs addressing in one paragraph may need addressing in every paragraph.

Ask for Help

There are many resources for writing assistance at UNC. Your in-class writing group, the Writing Center, and your instructor are all great places to start. Whoever you decide to go to for help, let your reader know where you are in the revision process and ask *specific* questions (“How can I make my paper better?” is not a specific question). Here are a few ideas:

- Is my thesis clear? What can I do to improve it?
- Does my writing follow the genre’s conventions and expectations?
- Does my second paragraph have enough support?
- Did I integrate source material effectively when discussing my third source?
- Can you show me a few places where my tone and language do and don’t match my target audience?

Instructor office hours, in particular, provide an opportunity to ask your instructor for specific clarification on their feedback and/or for additional feedback.

Get Away from Your Draft

Give yourself time away from the assignment to help you gain the perspective you need to think “like a reader” and approach your own work as an outsider. Reading your own writing with revision in mind is quite difficult. Allowing your drafts to sit for a day or three (or however long it takes to forget some of what you’ve written) before returning to them can help you see them with “new eyes” and identify big-picture issues. Don’t hole yourself up in the library and stare at your composition for hours on end. The farther you can get from the mind space in which you wrote the first draft, the more effective your second, third, or tenth drafts will look because you will be able to approach the draft as an outsider would.

Summaranalysis

In this revision strategy, you will summarize your whole paper in one paragraph and analyze the paragraph.

- Read each paragraph in your paper and write a one-sentence summary.
- Combine all those one-sentence summaries into one paragraph. This paragraph is a very basic outline of how your writing flows as currently constituted.
- Read the paragraph (out loud) and check it for unity, clarity, and logical progression. If there are any elements of the paragraph that seem out of place, illogical, or vague, revisit the section of the essay that sentence was based on and try to diagnose the issue.

If there are any paragraphs that were difficult to summarize, pay special attention to what concerns may be causing this difficulty, such as organization, logic, or support.

Work in Passes

Don’t try to revise your composition all at once every time you re-read it. Read through your composition numerous times, concentrating each time on one specific issue. For example, you may first focus on the quality of your supporting evidence by checking that research is consistently integrated throughout your paper; then, you may read again for transitions between and within paragraphs. Reading for one dimension of your paper at a time will keep you from trying to fix everything at once. Use comments on past assignments and drafts to help you decide what to look for and edit/revise.

Know Yourself

Not all of these strategies will work for you every time. University-level writing may be new to you, but you have written before. Maybe you know that you tend to worry about generating a clear thesis, maybe you often receive comments on awkward transitions, and maybe you've never written more than five pages on any subject. Yet, maybe you also know that you are a logical thinker who follows an outline well and you are great at understanding your audience's needs. All writers have strengths and improvement areas, and it's important to identify both so you can continue addressing those improvement areas while capitalizing on your strengths. .

Editing Strategies

Read Your Paper Backwards

Go sentence by sentence, looking for ways you can improve each sentence. Moving backwards prevents you from jumping ahead cognitively, which can keep you from seeing where sentence-level and word-level editing may be necessary.

Work in Passes

Working in passes is just as important in editing as it was in revision. During the editing phase, try a pass to check for sentence variety or for a specific mechanical issue, such as run-on sentences. Reviewing a resource, such as a UNC Writing Center handout, on the specific issue before you look for that concern can help make each editing pass more efficient.

Save Often

Revised and edited compositions will look substantially different from original drafts.

Develop a strategy to avoid potential data loss. For example:

- Google Docs will auto save as you write.
- Dropbox has a feature that retains all previous versions of a paper (every time you save it) for several months.
- A separate document can archive all your deleted work until you are sure you won't need it.

Proofreading Strategies

Hit Spell Check

If you do **nothing else**, hit spell check before you submit your assignment. Technology has given us this magical tool, and there's no faster way to lose an educated reader's respect than to misspell a word.

Read Out Loud

Hearing the words as they come off the page helps tremendously, and listening to your prose can be an easy way to recognize places your wording is convoluted or confusing. Having someone else read out loud to you (a friend, a classmate, even your computer, etc.) will help even more, because you will notice places they “trip” while reading, and you can highlight those areas for editing.

Change Devices

Simply seeing a paper in a different format will help you visualize it differently. Send your draft to a friend’s computer, your smartphone, or (gasp) the printer and have another look at it. Anything to get you away from the context/location in which you wrote the paper originally will help. Be creative.

Hit Spell Check Again

It’s on this list twice for a reason. Do it early, do it often.

Exercise 2D: Reverse Outline

Outlining is a helpful revision exercise for writers because it gives them a scaffolding for their paper. Reverse outlining is simply generating an outline for a paper that has already been written. Creating a reverse outline after writing a draft can be especially helpful as a way to double-check the organization and flow of your paper and ensure you’ve completed all parts of the assignment.

It’s easiest to reverse outline with a hard copy of your text and a handful of colorful highlighters or markers. Once you have those:

1. Read the text out loud and take notes in the margins every few sentences to remind you what that small section is talking about.
2. Highlight each of these sections in a different color (if you find connected themes or ideas, you can highlight them in the same color as the corresponding section).
3. Write a bullet point or two describing the highlighted sections to identify the main ideas
4. Fill in the space between these bullet points with the sub-topics that arrive.

You now have a reverse outline, but you’re not quite finished.

1. Read your new outline (again, out loud is better), listening to make sure everything flows logically.
 - a. Do the main ideas follow each other sequentially?

- b. Does each main idea have sub-topics that relate to it and each other?
2. If the reverse outline feels jumpy, odds are you either need to add evidence to your claims or you're talking about the same point in more than one place. Look for any gaps and add content that would help a reader make sense of your paper.
3. Compare your outline to the assignment sheet your instructor gave you to make sure you've completed all of the requirements.

Exercise 2E: Summaranalysis

In this revision strategy, you will summarize your whole paper in one paragraph and analyze the paragraph.

- Read each paragraph in your paper and write a one-sentence summary.
- Combine all those one-sentence summaries into one paragraph. This paragraph is a very basic outline of how your writing flows as currently constituted.
- Read the paragraph (out loud) and check it for unity, clarity, and logical progression. If there are any elements of the paragraph that seem out of place, illogical, or vague, revisit the section of the essay that sentence was based on and try to diagnose the issue.

If there are any paragraphs that were difficult to summarize, pay special attention to what concerns may be causing this difficulty, such as organization, logic, or support.

Exercise 2F: Chop It Up

Looking at each paragraph out of context can help you revise in ways that make your paragraphs more logical and cohesive. After you have a full, revised draft:

- Print each paragraph on its own page.
- Shuffle the pages and give them to a friend or classmate.
- Ask this reader to put the individual paragraphs in what seems to them the most logical order and return it to you

If the reader's order matches yours, you're well on your way to a solid composition. If not, troubleshoot: for example, if the reader switches your introduction and your conclusion, your conclusion may be summary heavy. If the reader puts your body paragraphs in the wrong order, you may have to work on topic sentences, paragraph-to-paragraph transitions, and/or the overall flow of your argument and evidence.

Exercise 2G: The Paramedic Method

This is a multi-pass editing exercise for strengthening verbs and eliminating repetitive language.

1. Locate long, convoluted, or “choppy” sentences.
2. Strive for fewer prepositions
 - a. Circle every preposition (of, in, about, for, onto, into)
 - b. Rearrange the text so that each prepositional phrase starts on a new line
 - c. Rework the sentence to cut down on the number of prepositions
3. Strive for strong verbs
 - a. Find and replace forms of the verb “to be” (am, are, is, was, were) with stronger verbs. Consider, for example, the stark difference between “this quote is important because” and “this quote demonstrates...”
 - b. Find and replace unnecessary nominalizations with strong verbs. Nominalizations are noun forms created from verbs or adjectives (e.g. *demonstration* ← *demonstrate*). To find nominalizations, search your document for nominalization endings (-tion/-ion, -ment, -ity/-ty, or -ness).
 - c. Eliminate passive voice by moving the agent (doer) into the subject position. (e.g.
4. Find and replace/remove
 - a. Redundancies (e.g. “I will propose and suggest,” “He explains to us saying”)
 - b. Clichés (“There is no time like the present”)
 - c. Vague phrases (“The medical professional told a man he was in love”).
5. Eliminate any long wind-ups (e.g. Perd Hapley’s overcomplicated and redundant segues: “The statement that this reporter has is a question”; “The story of the thing you’re about to watch is, soon, you’ll be seeing it”, and “Up next is my introduction to the next segment, and my introduction to the next segment is as follows: here’s the next segment”.)
6. Reread the sentence out loud.

Outcome 5: Writing with a Group

Peer Collaboration

Collaborating on a composition can be a polarizing experience—most people either love it or hate it. Whatever your current opinion about group work, writing with a group can be an excellent experience because your potential for interesting, engaging prose and solid, thoughtful argument increases with each person you add to the mix. Groups will vary in size and members will vary in ability, but the following principles can help you work so your final product is strong and seamless.

Know (and Offer) Your Strengths

When you're first organized in groups, take at least a few minutes to get to know each other. Personal connections are a great way to unite a group, and it's important to understand the comfort level of each person in the group. You have a decent grasp of what you're good at already, so make sure your group knows what talents you bring to the project. Whether you are generally comfortable (you feel confident writing any assignment), specifically trained (you've got a specialized skill others may lack), or somewhere in between, let your group know what you can offer.

Take Personal Responsibility

Most groups end up with a leader, either officially or unofficially, but in a true collaboration who facilitates doesn't matter nearly as much as everyone taking personal responsibility for the project. Someone extroverted and confident may offer to get things started, but that shouldn't stop the introverts in the group from owning the group's future work. Consider all group members equals and act accordingly, because you'll likely be sharing a grade, and your instructor will inevitably be aware of who is pulling their weight and who is sitting back and letting everyone else do the work for them (don't be *that* group member).

Divide and Conquer and Unite and Conquer Again

You can always split a task into parts and finish faster. However, compositions written in separate parts and then hastily stitched together with no attention to consistency are generally difficult to read. Split up the work so everyone has an equal portion, but be sure to also maximize your time together as a group in order to get a sense of what everyone is writing and what the project looks and sounds like as it grows. Go through your revision, editing, and proofreading stages together, reading out loud and taking time to identify and strengthen places that need more work. By the end of the project, if you can't give a full summary and basic outline of the project in its entirety, you're out of the loop and chances are your group, your project, and perhaps even your grade are going to suffer for it.

For more on the specific role of Collaboration in the UNC Writing Program, see Chapter 1: Writing at UNC.

Exercise 2H: Creating a Group Work Schedule

Complete the following Group Schedule worksheet to help you plan your approach to and divide the labor for your next group task.

Group Schedule

Project: [Example: U1F1]

Class date: [Example: Wednesday, 1/23]

For next class, our main goal is: [Example: to consolidate all group members' sections and generate a full draft of the assignment]

To accomplish this goal . . .

[include an item for each group member; group members can and should have overlapping responsibilities]

1. [Group member's name] will [task]. He/she will complete this task before [task completion date (remember that due dates/times should be set for between as well as before meeting times)] and submit it to [how do you want your group member to add this work to the project (example: submit to PM, post to Google doc, etc.)]

Example: Jennifer will edit the team's introduction to make sure it has a clear statement of the article's argument and a clear thesis. She will complete this task before Thursday at noon and submit it to the group google doc.

or

Jennifer will write at least 200 words on one key example from the chosen reading to be a part of the body of our essay. She will complete this task before 5pm Thursday to Partner Jim for incorporation into the draft.

2. [Group member's name] will [task] before [task completion date (remember that due dates/times should be set for between as well as before meeting times)] and submit it to [how do you want your group member to add this work to the project (example: submit to PM, post to Google doc, etc.)]

3. [Group member's name] will [task] before [task completion date (remember that due dates/times should be set for between as well as before meeting times)] and submit it to [how do you want your group member to add this work to the project (example: submit to PM, post to Google doc, etc.)]

4. [Group member's name] will [task] before [task completion date (remember that due dates/times should be set for between as well as before meeting times)] and submit it to [how do you want your group member to add this work to the project (example: submit to PM, post to Google doc, etc.)]

5. [Group member's name] will [task] before [task completion date (remember that due dates/times should be set for between as well as before meeting times)] and submit it to [how do you want your group member to add this work to the project (example: submit to PM, post to Google doc, etc.)]

6. [Group member's name] will [task] before [task completion date (remember that due dates/times should be set for between as well as before meeting times)] and submit it to [how do you want your group member to add this work to the project (example: submit to PM, post to Google doc, etc.)]