

STRONG BUSINESS WRITING

Revision Practices

Revising another person's writing can be relatively easy. Revising your own writing can be more difficult but is an important skill. This resource sheet will explore various strategies to make revision easier, faster and more effective.

Always revise. Whether you have written a lengthy report or a quick e-mail reply, always look through your writing before sharing or sending.

Obtaining Objectivity

The difficulty with revising your own writing lies in objectivity: after winnowing through many ideas and struggling to place those ideas into words, you cannot easily distance yourself from a text enough to read the text as someone else may read. Instead, your mind ignores errors and fills in missing pieces and gaps in ideas. The following strategies can be used to obtain distance from your text to make revision more effective.

Create Separation

The ideal situation would be to write the assignment and then allow time to pass before returning for revision with fresh eyes. If such separation is not possible, the following tactics can help to force your mind to be objective.

Read Aloud

If a text is short enough, you could try reading the draft aloud. Reading aloud slows down the mind and focuses the attention on the words. Another option would be to point to each word with a pen or a pencil as you read.

Read Backward

Like reading aloud, reading a text backward prevents the mind from skipping over words and ideas. Starting from the end of the paper, work backward sentence by sentence. Placing a piece of paper or a ruler over the preceding lines of text will aid in focusing attention on the sentence at hand.

Never Assume

Do not assume that the reader can read between the lines and fill in gaps in information or catch the joke you intended.

Strategic Revision

The following techniques can aid in making revision time more efficient.

Work from Big to Small

Focus revision efforts first on larger-scale issues (*e.g.*, structure of the paper, organization of ideas), next on mid-level issues (*e.g.*, articulation of ideas, sentence structure), and finally on small details (*e.g.*, grammar, punctuation, format). Perfecting the wording and punctuation of a sentence is pointless if the sentence ultimately needs to be omitted.

Refer to Main Point

Write down the main point of the text, *i.e.*, what readers understand, or should be persuaded of, after reading. Evaluate each paragraph relative to this main point; every sentence and idea must contribute to driving the reader to the same idea and conclusion.

Use Multiple, Focused Run-throughs

When focusing on the small details, such as punctuation or grammar, focus on one issue at a time. Run through the paper looking only for one problem, such as split infinitives. Then run through the paper again, focusing on a different issue, such as pronouns. You will find it easier to catch errors if you focus on one type of error at a time rather than looking for all errors at one time.

Use the Microsoft Word “Find” feature to search for problem areas. For example, to look for split infinitives, search for the word “to.” You can easily scroll through the document to find and then check uses of the infinitive. You should still be sure to read carefully and not rely on the “Find” feature.

Know Your Problem Areas

Pay attention to errors that you commonly make and check for those errors each time you revise. You can even create a list of frequent errors—or use the list provided in the *Business Writing Guide*—and check your writing against them. Each time you revise a paper, use the list to check for grammar and style errors.