

HOW TO REVISE YOUR ROUGH DRAFT

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Writing a rough draft is a late stage in the writing process. Before you get to this stage, be sure you've done a lot of preparation: clarified your topic, taken lots of notes, collected as many ideas in writing as you can. See the UTLC handout "Overcoming Writer's Block" for suggestions on time management and on all stages of the writing process.

PLAN to do a rough draft and to revise it. Promise yourself you won't turn in the very first ideas you put on paper.

PLAN to finish your rough draft a day or two before your paper is due so you will have time to revise it.

HOW TO PUT YOUR IDEAS ON PAPER

1. Gather about you all the MATERIALS you will need. Collect all your notes, books and partial drafts. Set out your word processor, or pens that work and plenty of paper. Other valuable items: a dictionary and/or a thesaurus, a stylebook, a grammar book.
2. Set aside a substantial period of TIME -- 2 or 3 hours -- to get started. Take your phone off the hook and tell your friends you're out of town.
3. Develop your THESIS. Read over your notes, lay them aside, and write one or two paragraphs in your own words explaining the main point of your paper, the essential message you've learned and are trying to communicate. Keep this before you as you write; revise it as you go only if necessary. This may become your introduction or conclusion. Your entire paper should be constructed to support and develop this thesis.
4. Make an OUTLINE. Your outline may be a list of topics, of sentences, or of questions you intend to answer in your paper. Put in a group similar ideas; consider in what order you want to present these ideas to your reader. Then arrange all your notes in order according to this outline.
5. Pause and relax for a moment. VISUALIZE YOUR READER in your mind's eye: your professor, a fellow classmate, one person to whom you are addressing your ideas. Imagine his or her sex, age, culture and life style, vocabulary, knowledge of your topic. Imagine that he or she is friendly toward your ideas but does not want to be bored. As you write, speak to this person.
6. TELL YOUR STORY QUICKLY. Don't feel you have to start with your introduction. Pick up the first one or two note cards, read them, then begin telling your reader about these ideas. Speak naturally and honestly in your own words through your computer or pen. Write quickly, using whatever words come easily to you. Don't worry about grammar or spelling or finding a "best" word. Don't try to impress. Don't censor your thoughts. Just be yourself on paper. If you get stuck, stop and take a break. Consider talking your ideas into a tape recorder if that is easier for you, and then transcribing them. You might ask a friend to listen to your ideas and write them down as you talk.
7. Work for short periods of time. Finish a paragraph or section, then TAKE A BREAK and relax for a few minutes. Give yourself credit for what you're accomplishing.
8. INCLUDE ALL YOUR IDEAS and information in this first draft. If some of it is irrelevant, you can remove it later. You can also change the organization later, or add new ideas if they occur to you.
9. DOUBLE OR TRIPLE SPACE, whether typing or handwriting, so you'll have room to make changes later.

Once you complete your rough draft, lay it aside for as long as you can afford so that you can come back to it objectively as if you were reading someone else's paper.

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PLAN to re-read your paper several times, each time looking for something different. As you work, be sure to take regular breaks so you will keep your mind fresh and alert.

First reading: organization

Underline or highlight the TOPIC SENTENCE in each paragraph. (If you discover you don't have one, write it!)

1. Read through only the topic sentences in your paper, or block these into a second document on your word processor. Does each sentence follow logically the one preceding it? Do they form a reasonable mini-essay in themselves? Do you like the sequence of ideas? Are similar ideas grouped together? CUT AND PASTE -- either literally, with scissors and paste, or electronically, with blocking on your word processor. Move ideas -- whole paragraphs, sentences, parts of text -- around like blocks to improve ORGANIZATION.
2. To insure overall CONTINUITY among paragraphs, tell your reader what point you're discussing, what you'll talk about next, etc. You may need to write some new sections, transition sentences or whole paragraphs.

Second reading: paragraphs and sentences

Take one paragraph at a time and read it out loud. Then ask yourself:

1. Does each sentence in the paragraph refer to the central idea stated in the topic sentence? Throw out IRRELEVANT SENTENCES or move them to a better location.
2. Consider PARAGRAPH LENGTH. If a paragraph is short, see if you've left questions unanswered; develop your ideas further. If too long, see if you can break it up into two or more shorter paragraphs.
3. Does each sentence follow the preceding one logically? Do you give your readers clues (words such as thus, therefore, first, because, but, etc.) to help them follow your thoughts? Rearrange sentences and add TRANSITIONS if necessary.
4. Do your sentences sound dull because they're too SHORT? Do they sound complex because they're LONG? Combine some; break others up into simple sentences.
5. Do you REPEAT the same words too often? Do you use words you don't need? Omit NEEDLESS WORDS and search the thesaurus for useful synonyms. Be sure words convey what you mean.
6. Circle all VERBS. Change passive to active voice. Search for fresh, powerful verbs. For example, change "Signs were seen by..." to "Witnesses detected...."
7. Read each sentence in the paragraph aloud to recognize ERRORS IN GRAMMAR, SPELLING AND PUNCTUATION. Correct these and typos.

Third reading: content

Ask a friend, your professor or T.A. to read your paper and give you feedback. Then ask yourself:

1. Do you BELIEVE what you've written? Do you UNDERSTAND your own ideas and your reasons? If necessary, reconsider your thesis or discuss your ideas with your professor.
2. Do you tell your reader in the beginning what you believe? Does every paragraph, sentence and word serve to DEVELOP YOUR THESIS? Speak SIMPLY and clearly to your reader. Edit out irrelevancies.
3. Have you documented with references and footnotes all your quotations? Not too many quotes? Final draft clean and easy to read? Check your STYLEBOOK for proper form.

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