



Revising for Organization

University Writing Center

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Using this Workshop

Revising means making major changes to a piece of writing. Revising usually refers to changes made in content, organization, and other higher-order concerns.

Editing refers to surface-level changes, such as spelling, grammar, and typographical errors. In this workshop, we will focus on **REVISING**.

This workshop can completed independently or with a peer. If working with a partner, follow all instructions, including those labeled “Peer Review Option.” If you are working independently, you may skip those instructions.

Note: All “Review Tasks” can be completed, regardless of whether you are working independently or with a peer.



What you'll need:

- A copy of your draft
- A copy of the assignment sheet
- Either a word processor or a pencil and paper
- A highlighter
- At least one partner (if choosing the “Peer Review” option)
- 45 minutes to an hour of time



Getting Started

Before beginning, review the assignment sheet carefully.

(Peer Review Option)

- Second, read your peer's paper without marking anything.
- Before providing advice to a writer, it is important to understand their entire argument or topic.



Part I: Elements of an Introduction

- There are many ways that you can approach an introduction to a text, here is a common model:
 1. An attention-getting opening!
 2. Explanation of the topic's significance!
 3. A thesis statement!

The following slides will provide a closer look at these elements.



1-1: Attention-getters

The first sentences of your essay is important because it gets your reader's attention and sets the tone for the entire piece. Here are some helpful hints and some things to avoid as you look at the first sentence:

1. Draw the reader's attention to something surprising about your topic or ground the topic in real experiences by telling a story or using a personal anecdote.
2. Be careful with rhetorical questions, especially if they have yes or no answers. If a reader can answer can't identify with the question (or if your questions makes assumptions about readers), you then you risk losing your audience before they ever get to your thesis.

REVIEW TASK 1:

Imagine you are a part of the audience for this paper. Will the opening sentences draw you into the paper? If not, make a suggestion for the writer using a strategy above. You can also reference our [Art of the Introduction](#) handout.



1-2: Explaining the Topic's Significance

One way to keep readers' attention is to suggest early on what the importance or significance of your work is. In other way, why should readers care about your topic?

REVIEW TASK 2:

Point to the section of the introduction that shows or tells why the topic is important.

- If you can't find it in the introduction, write down on a separate sheet of paper why you think the topic is important.



1-3: The Thesis Statement

The thesis is the heart of the writer's paper. It prepares readers for what's ahead and/or hints at the argument(s) that will be made. It serves as the reference point for each part of the paper.

REVIEW TASK 3:

1. On a separate sheet of paper, write down what you believe to be the paper's thesis.
2. On the paper, find and underline the actual thesis statement.
3. Compare. Does your impression of the thesis match what is in the paper? If not, make a suggestion for revising the thesis.



Part 2: Body Paragraphs

In Part 2, we'll cover the following:

1. Topic sentences
2. Developing focused paragraphs
3. Transitions



2-1: Topic Sentences

Topic sentences are mini-introductions to your paragraphs. Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that indicates what the paragraph will be about. It may also transition from the paragraph before it.

REVIEW TASK 4:

- Underline the topic sentence for each paragraph. If you can't find a topic sentence, add a note so that the writer can add one.
- For each topic sentence you've underlined, answer the following:
 - Confirm that the topic sentence accurately previews what follows in the rest of the paragraph. If it doesn't make a note on the draft suggesting revision.
 - Does the paragraph contain information that has nothing to do with the topic sentence? If so, identify that information for the writer.



2-2: Developing Focused Paragraphs

Remember that a paragraph is one complete thought – no more and no less. The basic parts of a paragraph are:

1. Topic sentence
2. Clarifying sentence (if needed)
3. Support or evidence for the topic sentence
4. Explanation / statement of significance for the support or evidence

For more information on paragraphing, see the Paragraphing Strategies handout.

REVIEW TASK 5:

1. Does each paragraph follow the model above? Does it provide important details? Does it fully flesh out the idea contained in the topic sentence? Make a note next to any paragraph that needs further development. You may also write down which of these elements above is needed.
2. Does each paragraph add to the main idea contained in the thesis? If not, make a suggestion for better connecting the paragraph to the thesis.



2-3: Transitions

- Transitions may occur at both the ends and the beginnings of paragraphs.
- The last sentence of each paragraph should round out the idea of that paragraph, but it can also “lean” into the focus of the next paragraph as well. The paragraphs should follow a logical progression.
- The beginnings of new paragraphs should contain transition words or phrases that link them to the paragraphs that have just ended. Consult your handbook or the Writing Center’s handout on [Transitions in Speaking and Writing](#) for ideas for creating smooth transitions between ideas.

REVIEW TASK 6:

Look for transition words, phrases, or sentences at the beginning and/or end of each paragraph. If you have trouble finding a transition, make a note saying so on the draft.



Part 3: Conclusions

In Part 3, we will cover:

1. Beginning the concluding paragraph
2. Recapping the Main Ideas
3. The “so what” statement



3-1: Beginning the Conclusion

The conclusion of the essay is very important. It will create the last impression that the reader will take away with him/her, so the writing here has to be good.

While there are different opinions of how to begin a concluding paragraph, most writing instructors today recommend avoiding the phrase “In conclusion...”

REVIEW TASK 7:

Check the conclusion for the words “in conclusion.” If you find them, cross them out and see how sentence sounds without them.

- “In conclusion...” is sometimes used to replace a transition from the body of the paper to the conclusion. Identify the transition between the body paragraphs and the conclusion. If you can’t find one, suggest one.



3-2: Recapping the Main Ideas

The concluding paragraph should offer a “recap” of the essay. In other words, the thesis and support should be rearticulated. However, the thesis and support should not be written in exactly the same way as in the introduction; rather, they should be rewritten using different language or through a new perspective.

REVIEW TASK 8:

Does the language in the conclusion repeat what was said earlier in the essay? If so, highlight those sentences.



3-3: The “So What?” Statement

The main part of a concluding paragraph is the “so what?” statement.

Somewhere in the conclusion, there should be a statement saying why the topic of this essay is important. What's at stake? What is the bigger picture? Many writing instructors refer to this as the *exigence* of the essay.

REVIEW TASK 9:

Identify the “so what” statement. Again imagine that you are a (skeptical) part of the audience for this paper. Does the “so what” convince you of the topic's importance?



Part 4: The Rhetorical Context

No matter how well constructed your paragraphs are or how strong your introduction and conclusion, your written product is only going to be successful if it responds to the context in which it is being written.

Remember that assignment sheet from way back in “Getting Started?” It’s time to return to it and think about how well the paper in front of you responds to those guidelines.

REVIEW TASK 10:

Using the assignment sheet or task guidelines as a checklist, compare the requirements to the paper that you have just reviewed. Highlight any sections on the that were not clearly addressed in the paper.



Part 5: Wrap-Up

- Identifying Strengths
- Identifying Areas for Improvement
- Receiving Feedback and Setting Goals



5-1: Strengths

REVIEW TASK 11:

(Independent Review Option)

- Spend 2 – 3 minutes reviewing your notes and reflecting on where your essay is most successful or most clearly meets the assignment guidelines.

(Peer Review Option)

- Write down three things that your peer did well.
- Think about specific places in the paper that you think were effective and explain what you like about those sections.
- Let the writer know which parts of the paper have the most potential.
- Be sincere in your responses



5-2: Opportunities for Improvement

REVIEW TASK 12:

(Independent Review Option)

- Spend 2 – 3 minutes writing about what part(s) of the paper concern you most. What questions do you need answered in order to help you revise successfully?

(Peer Review Option)

- What should the writer focus on first in revision?
- Remember, in this workshop we are focusing on thesis statement, organization, paragraphing, and other “higher order concerns.” Don’t include changes related to editing, proofreading, or formatting unless those things interfere with your ability to understand the writing.
- Be kind. Make sure that your feedback is respectful and helpful.



5-3: Receiving Feedback

At this point, you have completed the “Review” portion of the workshop. It’s time to return to the work you have done and set revision goals.

(Peer Review Option)

Once you and your peer have finished reading and responding to each other’s writing, give the papers back and review the notes that your peer has provided.

Tips:

- Read your partner’s feedback with an open mind and be willing to make changes. Good writing comes from good revising.
- If you have time, repeat the peer review workshop with another peer before moving on to “Setting Goals.” Remember that the purpose of peer review is to gain a different perspective on your writing. Having more perspectives means having more ideas for revision.



5-4: Setting Goals

REVIEW TASK 13:

After reviewing the notes you now have about your work-in-progress, make a list of the 3 revision goals that you feel are most important to address before submitting your assignment.



Recap

- Review Task 1: Attention-Getters (slide 6)
- Review Task 2: Explaining the Topic and its Significance (slide 7)
- Review Task 3: The Thesis Statement (slide 8)
- Review Task 4: Topic Sentences (slide 10)
- Review Task 5: Developing Focused Paragraphs (slide 11)
- Review Task 6: Transitions (slide 12)
- Review Task 7: Beginning the Conclusion (slide 14)
- Review Task 8: Recapping the Main Ideas (slide 15)
- Review Task 9: The “So What?” Statement (slide 16)
- Review Task 10: The Rhetorical Context (slide 17)
- Review Task 11: Strengths (slide 19)
- Review Task 12: Opportunities for Improvement (slide 20)
- Review Task 13: Setting Goals (slide 22)



What's Next?

Let the Writing Center help!

- Bring the notes from your review and your revision goals to the Writing Center! We can help you apply what you've learned to your draft.
- Check out some of our other workshops and handouts available at www.mtsu.edu/writing-center.
- Bring your notes to the Writing Center session and review your work with a Writing Consultant.

To schedule an appointment, call 615-904-8237 or make an appointment online at www.mtsu.mywconline.com.

