Revising and editing an essay

So, you’ve finished writing your essay? But, it’s not over yet! If you want those good results, give the revising and editing process the time attention it deserves. Following are some revising and editing checklists and some procedural tips to help you focus on:

1. Structure & content
2. Mechanics & presentation
3. Tips & procedures

SPELLING and GRAMMAR CHECKERS can be useful tools in your word processing program if you use them well. Sometimes, they can help you to think about your spelling and grammar, but other times they can be misleading. So, you need to understand the benefits and limitations of these word processing tools and use your own knowledge of writing rules.

VIDEO DEMO: Writing Editing and Proofreading your Essay (Long, but spot on!)

Check your essay for structure, content, mechanics and presentation.

1. Structure and content

   • Introduction: Follow the pattern
     > Did you begin with defining your MAIN TOPIC (first sentence)?
     > Have you followed the first sentence by stating which PART of the MAIN topic will be addressed (next sentence/s)
     > Did you finish the introduction by declaring your thesis statement (what you intend to achieve) e.g. This essay will … (final sentence)

   • Body: Check each paragraph.
     > Is there a clear topic sentence?
     > Do the support sentences fit the topic sentence?
     > Is there enough support (paraphrases, direct quotes)?
     > Have you overused direct quotes that could be paraphrases?
     > Have you used in-text references correctly?
     > Is there any irrelevant material?
     > Are the paragraphs logically sequenced?

   • Conclusion
     > Does the conclusion fit the introduction?
     > Is the topic re-stated without being repeated?
     > Is the line of argument re-stated?

   • Content
     > Has the question been answered? If there is more than one part, have you answered each part?
     > Are the points relevant?
     > Is the evidence convincing?
     > Is there sufficient evidence?
     > Is your evidence from academic sources?
     > Are all quotes and references accurately referenced?

See also, ASO online workshops:
- Introduction paragraphs.
- Beginner paragraphs, Perfecting paragraphs & Academic paragraphs.
- Conclusion paragraphs.
- Question analysis
- Analysing the question.
2. Mechanics and presentation

“Never think that what you've written can't be improved. You should always try to make the sentence that much better and make the argument that much clearer. Go over and over the words and reshape them as many times as is needed.” (Tracy Chevalier, "Why I Write" The Guardian, Nov. 24, 2006)

- Sentence level
  - Does each sentence have a subject and a verb?
  - Is there agreement between the subject and the verb?
  - Does one sentence lead on smoothly to the next?
  - Is each sentence punctuated appropriately?
  - Are the sentences varied in type

- Word level
  - Are the words chosen carefully?
  - Are there any spelling errors?
  - Is the language non-discriminatory?
  - Are transitional words and phrases used appropriately?

- Presentation
  - Is a title page required?
  - Does it include your name and student number, the name and code number of the subject, the title of the essay and the assignment number? (use footer or header tool)
  - Does the title of the essay appear at the top of the first page?
  - Are the pages numbered?
  - Is double spacing used for the text?
  - Is single spacing used for longer quotes which are indented?
  - Is a list of references or a bibliography included?
  - Is it complete?
  - Is it on a separate page?
  - Does it conform to the conventions of the referencing system used?

3. Tips and procedures

TIP 1: First draft It helps if you leave it for a day or so, then read again with ‘fresh’ eyes. Before printing your draft, read it on screen to pick up typing and spelling errors using the computer spell and grammar check. Get another person to read it and give you feedback as it is often hard to ‘see’ your own errors.

TIP 2: Revising The best time to revise is not right after you’ve completed a draft (although at times this is unavoidable). Instead, wait a few hours—even a day or two, if possible—in order to gain some distance from your work. This way you’ll be less protective of your writing prepared to make changes.

TIP 3: Improving Revision also means looking again at what we have written to see how we can improve it. Some of us start revising as soon as we begin a rough draft restructuring and rearranging sentences as we go. Then, we return to the draft, perhaps several times, to make further revisions. Revising means reconsidering our topic, our readers, and purposes. Taking the time to rethink our approach may encourage us to make major changes in the content and structure of our work.

TIP 4: Editing We should keep in mind that revising involves much more than just correcting errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Revising involves editing your work for meaning and considering whether you have appropriate information for the essay question. You shouldn't waste time carefully correcting a paper that you haven't edited at all because you may end up discarding entire sentences and paragraphs. Evaluate what you have written before you try to fix it.

TIP 5: One last bit of advice: Read your work aloud when you revise. You may hear problems in your writing that you can't see.