

Revising and editing an essay

So, you've finished writing your essay? But, it's not over yet! All writing is as much about revising as creating. 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.

Check your essay for structure, content, mechanics and presentation. You can cover all of these by asking the following questions.

1. Structure and content

• Introduction

Is the topic clearly indicated?
Are essential definitions provided?
Is the direction of the argument clear?
Have you signalled the

See also, the Academic Skills site workshop Academic skills online: [Introduction paragraphs](#).

• 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 presented in a systematic way?

See also, the Academic Skills site workshops Academic skills online: [Beginner paragraphs](#), [Perfecting paragraphs & Academic paragraphs](#).
See also other Academic Skills fact sheets: [Writing essays, reviews & reports](#).

• Conclusion

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

See also, the Academic Skills site workshop Academic skills online: [Conclusion paragraphs](#).

• 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 recorded?

See also, the Academic skills site workshop Academic skills online: [Question analysis](#).
See also other ASO fact sheets on [Analysing the question](#).

"Never think that what you've written can't be improved. You should always try to make the sentence that much better and make a scene 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)

2. Mechanics and presentation

- **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 included?
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?
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?

See also other Academic Skills fact sheets on [Writing correctly](#).

See also other Academic Skills fact sheets on [Writing correctly & Writing essays, reviews & reports](#).

3. Tips and procedures

TIP 1: It sometimes helps if you leave it for a day or so, then read with 'fresh' eyes. Before printing your draft, read through it on screen to pick up any obvious typing or spelling errors using the spell and grammar check facility on your computer. Sometimes, it helps to get another person to read it through and give you feedback too as it is often hard to 'see' your own errors.

TIP 2: As a general rule, 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 and better prepared to make changes. (To find out some of the ways in which professional writers revise their work, visit the web site: Writers on Rewriting.)

TIP 3: Revision 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 work out our ideas. Then we return to the draft, perhaps several times, to make further revisions. Revising is an opportunity to reconsider our topic, our readers, even our purpose for writing. Taking the time to rethink our approach may encourage us to make major changes in the content and structure of our work.

TIP 4: 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.