

CTC Tips and Strategies: The Process (and Art) of Revision

In the writing process, the word “revision” is often defined as “the process of analysis and improvement.” This word’s meaning should sound familiar to engineers, as a similar definition is often used for engineering itself. In a way, revision is simply the application of engineering principles to the writing process. Like engineering, there is never one right answer in writing, nor is there one way to go about getting it. However, there are some simple guidelines to follow when revising, and they are as follows:

- 1) After the completion of a first draft, be sure to take some time off from the process. A few days are preferable, but if the timeline is tight, a few hours will suffice. Doing this will promote a more objective second reading.
- 2) After taking time off, be sure to read the draft aloud. Mistakes in grammar or gaps in logic may evade the eye of the silent reader but rarely evade the ear of an attentive listener. During this first reading, make a list of aspects of the draft that need improvement. Some particular things to look for and questions to ask are:
 - a) **Purpose/Audience:**
Does the draft speak to its intended audience?
Does it fulfill the purpose it was intended for?
 - b) **Tone/Rhetorical Emphasis:**
Does the draft contain the appropriate amount of fact and persuasion?
 - c) **Unity:**
Do all of the paragraphs support the thesis?
Do all of the sentences in each paragraph support the topic sentence?
 - d) **Completeness:**
Is all of the necessary information present?
Is all of the present information necessary?
- 3) After the list is complete, begin making the required improvements, but be sure to focus on only one or two issues at a time. Trying to fix everything at once may be faster, but concentrating on one problem at a time will result in much more overall improvement for the draft. Some tips for specific topics are:
 - a) **Word choice:**
Use a thesaurus! They are specifically designed to assist in revision.
 - b) **Grammar:**
Try reading the draft backwards, sentence by sentence. This will help the focus of the revisions to center on grammar, rather than global rhetorical issues.
 - c) **Audience:**
Read from the perspective of the intended audience and decide whether your audience is receiving the message you are trying to send.
- 4) After you feel all of the issues are fixed, make one final reading focusing on the unity of old and new material. Pay special attention to the introduction if major parts of the draft have been changed.

Once unity is achieved, the draft can be considered revised. Again, if time allows, take time off and try the whole process again in a few days. Like in engineering, strive for effectiveness, not perfection. Revising can be a never-ending process, because writing is never perfect. However, by following the above steps and using your engineering prowess, it can be darn good.