



Revision vs. Editing etc.

What Is Revision?

Revision requires thinking about your paper in a new way.

To adequately revise a draft of a paper, you must be able to see it from a different perspective. That perspective most often is the reader's perspective. Your paper may be perfectly clear to you, the writer. You know the material. These are your ideas. You know what you mean. But what did you actually write? Did you explain as fully as you could? Did you make it clear when you were moving on to a new argument? Did you relate all your examples to the question you set out to answer? You don't know the answer to these questions unless you can imagine your paper as the reader receives it.

A real revision then involves clarifying your argument, adding needed material, taking out things that don't belong. It involves thinking your paper through again. Often you don't know what you're really writing about until you've written it. Only when you've gotten to the end of your draft do you see the point you were making. To revise, you often need to turn the paper on its head, and put that point at the beginning. Then you need to make sure that argument is followed all the way through. So some paragraphs may have to go, even though they were well-written.

What is editing?

Editing is the final stage of revision, when you make changes to your sentences to make them read better. Revision requires thinking about your whole paper. But you may edit your paper sentence by sentence. Many people edit backward, starting with the last sentence. This allows you to focus on the clarity of each sentence separately. In the editing stage, you correct spelling errors, add or change punctuation, change wording. Editing is a clean-up operation. Your paper will say essentially the same thing after you've edited it, but it will sound smoother and clearer.

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Revision continued

What is proofreading?

Proofreading is the final stage of editing. You are looking for spelling errors, wrong words, punctuation errors, that you might not have noticed after editing. You proofread when everything else is done. You don't intend to change any words. You only want to find mistakes. Often people are so sick of their own writing after they've done a lot of editing that it helps to have someone else proofread.

What is spellcheck?

Spellcheck is a very unreliable method of proofreading. If you aren't a good speller in the first place, Spellcheck very often makes things worse. If you've spelled "particularly" incorrectly, Spellcheck advises you to substitute some other word such as "practicum," which makes no sense at all. Honestly, your instructors would rather have a poorly spelled paper than an unreadable one. The less confident you are about your proofreading skills, the more strongly I would advise you to stay away from Spellcheck.