

Approaching Revision - Vidcast Transcript

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Hi, this is Heather from the Purdue Writing Lab. Welcome to our virtual format Intensive Writing Experience!

In this video, we will be talking about Ways to Approach Revision. The purpose of this mini lesson is to help you prepare for the rest of our IWE together and to start thinking about your revision process.

For those of you who are in the drafting stage of your writing, try to think of this time as an opportunity to plan ahead. What elements of your document can you start to think about now in order to make your revision process easier in the future?

For those of you who are in the revising stage of your writing process, this presentation is meant to help you identify manageable ways to revisit and strengthen your work. It can be intimidating to think about revision as one massive task; instead, let's chat about smaller, more specific goals.

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Throughout our Intensive Writing Experience, we'll begin our videos with time to journal. Writing is a process, and self-reflection is an important part of that process! Please pause the video here and take five minutes to jot down your thoughts. We'll be able to share our ideas together later when we chat as a group.

To get started, let's take five minutes to reflect on revision. Think of the last project you revised. How did you go about making changes to your document? What changes did you make? Were you making changes based on a reader/reviewer's feedback? How did you organize your approach to revision? Try to be specific as you craft your journal response.

If you haven't had the opportunity to revise a project as much as you thought you should, you can also reflect on the barriers that got in the way of your revision process.

Let's pause here. I'll see you five minutes!

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Welcome back! When we think about revision, it's important to remember that revising and editing are not the same. Revision allows writers to make large-scale changes to a document while Editing offers a way to make small-scale changes to a document.

One of our fellow Intensive Writing Experience leaders, Mitch, has a few great metaphors to think about the differences here. Think of your document as a house. When you revise, you're taking on projects like construction or demolition. You're building new paragraphs like creating an addition to a house, tearing down weaker paragraphs or sections that don't serve your project well, and restructuring the foundation of your argument by addressing the overall organization of your text.

Once you're finished with your revisions, then you can start to edit your work. Editing, like Mitch says, allows you to make smaller, more cosmetic changes. Just like you could purchase a few new throw pillows or paint a few walls to spruce up your home, you can edit your document to look for proofreading errors and other smaller elements to add the final polish to your work. Just like it wouldn't make sense to redecorate a room you were going to demolish or tear down, it wouldn't be a productive use of your time to stress over fixing a few comma splices in a paragraph that you might end up deleting.

These metaphors help us to remember that it's important to address higher-order or global concerns like structure and argument clarity first before combing through smaller-order or local concerns like grammar.

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When we think about revision, there are four major levels to consider, including document-level revision, chapter-level revision, paragraph-level revision, and sentence-level revision. Each of these levels flow into one another, starting from the largest or broadest level (the document-level), trickling down to the smallest level with sentence-level revision. Throughout the rest of this video, we will discuss what to consider for each of these levels.

Again, if you are still in the middle of writing or creating the bulk of your work, you can also think about these same levels in terms of drafting.

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Let's start off on the document-level. As you reflect on your document as a whole, you can start to identify genre conventions that will help you either to make changes to technical portions of your work or to begin drafting your work in an



efficient way. Think about genre conventions like the overarching rules or guidelines for a specific type—or genre—of writing. For example, if you're writing a personal letter to someone, you know you will have to address the letter to the recipient and end with a closing salutation. Also, you would know that it wouldn't make sense to include a table of contents for a personal letter.

When reflecting on your document as a whole, you can start by creating a checklist for yourself. Are all the appropriate pieces of the document present?

- Do you have an appropriate title?
- If you need to include an abstract, did you do so?
- Do you have a Table of Contents?
- Do you have a References list? Is it formatted correctly?

Other questions to consider here are about formatting. Is the document formatted correctly? Here, you can think about:

- Font type
- Font size
- Spacing
- Margin size
- Page numbers/running head
- Indentation at the beginning of each paragraph and/or a space between paragraphs

In terms of large-scale organization, you can also think about document-level concerns like:

- Is the document divided into the appropriate number of sections & subsections?
- Are sections & sub-sections titled appropriately?
- Are headings of various levels appropriately differentiated from other text & consistent throughout the document?
- Do chapter lengths seem balanced?
- Does the document have an overall introduction and a conclusion?
- Does the order of the chapters make sense within disciplinary conventions?
- Does the overall main idea relate to each chapter? Is that relationship clear?

Feel free to pause here and reflect on the genre-specific elements of your current project and other possible you need to consider in terms of formatting. You can

also check out resources like the Purdue Thesis and Dissertation Office, the graduate school handout, citation managers like Zotero or EndNote through the Purdue Library page, or Sample documents from your academic discipline for more guidance on document-level concerns.

Later this week, we'll talk about reverse outlining and genre analysis to keep thinking through document-level elements.

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Moving down to chapter-level strategies for revision, you can continue to reflect on academic discipline conventions when you think about whether or not each chapter has an introductory paragraph and a concluding paragraph.

- Does the order of sections and sub-sections within a specific chapter meet disciplinary requirements for your field? For example, if you need a methods section, do you have one, and is it well developed and clear?
- If you're including charts, tables, or diagrams, do they all have a title or description if appropriate?

In terms of organization and clarity on the chapter-level, you can consider questions like:

- Does the order of paragraphs within each section display appropriate logic?
- Are the relevant terms defined when you introduce them to your reader for the first time?
- Are all abbreviations or acronyms written out the first time they appear?

Feel free to pause here and reflect on your progress in terms of these chapter-level elements.

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So far, we've talked about broad elements to consider your document as a whole as well as the individual chapters that make up your document. Now, let's turn to smaller-level elements. Whether you're revising your work already or are in the middle of crafting your paragraphs for the first time, here are some things to remember when revising or drafting your paragraphs.

If it helps, you can think about each paragraph as a sandwich or hamburger. Just like a sandwich needs a top piece of a bread, a bottom piece of bread, and

delicious fillings on the inside to be considered complete, there are a number of things that each paragraph needs.

Here are some questions to consider in terms of your paragraph-level progress:

- Does each paragraph have a topic and transition sentence?
- Does the topic sentence match the content of the paragraph?
- Does the order of information within each paragraph display appropriate logic?
- Is the paragraph shorter than 4 sentences or longer than 7 sentences? (If so, consider expanding or splitting the paragraph.)
- Do transition words show the connection of ideas between sentences within a single paragraph?
- Do the same words or phrases appear multiple times in the same paragraph? (e.g. “however,” “in particular,”)
- Does each paragraph include a variety of sentence structures?

As we continue our Intensive Writing Experience together, we will revisit this topic during our presentation on paragraph organization and flow. As always, feel free to pause here to continue thinking about your paragraph-level progress so far.

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Looking at our fourth and final level for this presentation, let’s talk about ways to approach sentence-level revision. Here, we can start to center concerns for clarity, concision, and grammar. In future presentations, we will revisit sentence-level writing when we talk about punctuation and sentence combinations, so can keep an eye out for those topics as we continue our Intensive Writing Experience.

Thinking through sentence-level writing and revision can feel intimidating. If you’re not sure where to begin, it can be helpful to read your work out loud or to listen to a trusted friend or colleague (or IWE group member!) to read your work out loud to you. It can sometimes be easier to catch errors by listening for moments of awkwardness or confusion instead of simply reading your work silently.

Here are some questions to consider as you think through sentence-level revision:

- Does every sentence have a subject, an object, and a verb?
- Is the same word repeated more than once in a sentence?
- Does the order of information within each sentence make sense? Would rearranging it increase clarity?
- Can unnecessary prepositions (e.g., “of”) be deleted?

- Are verbs conjugated correctly?
- Are verbs in the correct tense?
- Are sentences correctly constructed for active or passive voice as appropriate?
- Are sentences with two or more equal parts parallel and balanced?
- Is the appropriate transition word(s) used to show the relationship between two or more ideas within a sentence?
- Is punctuation (commas, periods, colons, semi-colons, etc.) used correctly?

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Now that we've established some foundational questions to reflect on document-level, chapter-level, paragraph-level, and sentence-level writing and revision, let's take a few minutes to also think about another driving factor for revision. As many of us have probably experienced, revision can often be guided by an external reader's feedback. A great way to plan for revision is to try to identify the types of feedback that you feel would be most helpful to you and your writing process.

If you are planning to submit a portion of your work to an advisor, tutor, or friend for feedback, you can draft a brief writer's memo for your reader. Writer's memos allow you to reflect on where you are in your writing process, the goals you have for your document in the long-term, and what you would like your reader to focus on and/or comment on most.

If any of you have made an appointment with a writing lab tutor, you'll remember that before your session, you filled out a form to assist your tutor to understand how to best help you. For example, if you have identified that you are struggling with paragraph-level clarity and organization, you could ask your reader to help you figure out how to address those concerns.

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Once you receive feedback from an outsider reader, you can make a strategic plan for your revision by organizing the suggestions you have received in order of importance.

If you are submitting to a journal for publication, keep in mind that you may need to respond to the feedback you received in writing. You will often need to respond to ALL of the suggestions posed to you by journal reviewers. While you do not need to accept each suggestion, you have been given by reviewers, you do need to be able to defend your rationale if you have chosen to ignore certain points of

feedback. Sometimes, different reviewers will disagree with one another. A helpful strategy here is to look for points of overlap and priorities these lines of common ground first.

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We have made it to the end of our first Intensive Writing Experience presentation! As we close here, take five minutes to revisit the goals you have set up for yourself for this week. As you plan ahead for the rest of this Intensive Writing Experience, identify your top priority goals for revision. If you are still drafting, strategize ways to help your future self.

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Thanks for joining me today! Happy writing and revising, everyone. Until next time...

