



An Eye Toward Revision

As you think about revisions of your writing, you'll want to recognize several different kinds of revision.

- 1) Revisions that re-think the assignment require massive changes, sometimes what seems to be an entirely different paper. You may have misunderstood the assignment, or chosen a topic that didn't let you do your best work. You may also need a massive revision, even if you keep the same kernel of an idea, when you find that your ideas on the topic have changed substantially or when you want to try for a different overall tone or effect.
- 2) Revisions that expand, re-arrange, or reconsider aspects of your original paper allow you to keep something of the original writing, though you may have to create a different frame. Sometimes it is possible to blend together two or more assignments into a single effective paper, but such a revision of blending will require careful thinking about organization, transitions, and framing to make the finished product smooth, coherent, and effective.
- 3) Perhaps the most common revisions are those that eliminate the marks of the assignment. If, for example, you have referred to the requirements of the assignment, your paper will be more effective if you imagine transforming it to stand alone outside the class. References to readings or to class discussions also mark the paper as "class work," but the most effective essays make those references understandable to readers who have not been members of the class. Making the transition from class assignment to independent essay will also require you to think about why you would want an audience to know about the things you write about, and who exactly that audience is. If you have a purpose and an audience in mind, your writing will be more coherent and effective.
- 4) Another frequent revision is to continue from where you left off. Your essay may be perfectly effective for as far as it goes, but leaves unanswered a more interesting or pressing question/issue that you didn't consider in the first draft. Revising to consider this previously unacknowledged issue may be a matter of simply adding onto what you already have, but frequently the addition requires a slightly different frame. In some cases, the "larger" question allows you to position what you had previously written as an illustration or example, and requires you to add additional examples to fully support the larger analysis.
- 5) The last kind of revision you should consider is the kind of editing and fine tuning that are frequently the focus of "correction" exercises in high school English classes. At some point, you will want to take all of the work for your portfolio though this level of revision, checking for punctuation and spellings, complete sentences and word choice. A more difficult level of this

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fine-tuning is considering tone and the ways that your writing has represented you and your topic. Depending on your audience, purpose and style, you may have to undertake massive changes in content as well as sentence form and word choice in order to create a consistent rhetorical style.

*** The most successful revisions (at least for 105) are ones where you use the opportunity to write again as a way of thinking further about the topic or issue you have chosen. If you aren't really interested in the topic, if you can't really make yourself care about the issues involved, your writing is not likely to demonstrate the kind of engaged thinking through and responding to the intellectual conversations that the readings are meant to engender. It is perfectly reasonable in 105 to find yourself able to articulate the problems without knowing the solutions, or to see more than two sides of an issue. You need not have neat solutions, and your papers don't have to arrive at a tidy conclusion in order to be effective. Academic writing frequently ends by pointing to the issues that remain unresolved or the way that commonplace renditions of the issues that remain unresolved, or to the way that commonplace renditions of the issues are unsatisfying once the complexity of the situation is acknowledged. Your papers can also end in this state of uncertainty, in which you can describe the problem but don't have the solution. This stance is often called problematizing as opposed to problem solving. Remember then, that the best papers for this course, and for other academic purposes, are ones in which it is clear you have done some careful and detailed thinking, and can no longer be satisfied with the easiest answers.