

Yale Department of English



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English 114 Guide
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Revision Guide

This guide defines the role of revision in writing and thinking and offers strategies to help you revise effectively.



What is revision?

English 114 will encourage you to think differently about revision than perhaps you are used to. In your first drafts, the comments you receive on your papers will push you to think of revision beyond tweaking a sentence or correcting typographical errors. You will learn to appreciate the challenges and rewards of **seeing your draft anew**, thinking beyond individual claims to the coherence of your argument. The revised drafts that you will submit in your Writing Seminars are therefore opportunities to **further and complicate your claims, enrich your analyses, enhance the structure of your argument, and fine tune your thinking.**



Strategies for Effective Revision

Read comments carefully and look for patterns in the feedback

Look for patterns in the feedback on your papers to understand the patterns in your own thinking and writing. For instance, do you notice repeated questions asking you to clarify claims or ideas? Multiple requests for clarification might require more than editing the language or structure of your sentences. Such feedback might instead signal a need to re-read specific passages to clarify your own understanding of the text. Or perhaps, you receive comments about repetitive claims or ideas in your paragraphs. You might have run out of new ideas because you need to select better passages to examine or deepen your close readings of the text. In other words, try not to think superficially about correcting what is already on the page. Instead, try to understand for yourself what might have contributed to any issues in your writing and what **adjustments you need to make in your reading, thinking, and your own writing process** to improve your argument.

Revision is an opportunity to do something new, to see your draft with fresh eyes.

Create a list of priorities

Based on the feedback that you have received from your peers and your instructor, you will need to determine what to prioritize in your next draft. Make a list of priorities, starting from highest to lowest order, and begin thinking about how you can address each aspect of your writing. All aspects of your writing will not require the same level or kind of attention. Pay the most attention to concerns about the **logic and development of your argument** and save polishing your prose for later. Budget your time so that you can give adequate attention to the aspects of your writing that demand the most intellectual work.

Talk about your project

In English 114, you will have the support of your instructor, peers, and other writing resources as you revise your work. Use these resources to strategize, gather additional information, or try out new ideas as you work on your draft. The earlier you use these resources, the better. Articulating your ideas to others will force you to clarify your claims, incorporate better evidence into your argument, and respond to counter-claims or questions you might not have previously considered. **If you have questions about your professor's comments or feedback from your peers, do not be afraid to ask.** Your professors want to hear from you. Even students who are reticent about talking to their instructors have said that when they do, they leave those conversations with plans for revision and feeling more confident to revise their work. Likewise, asking clarifying questions to peer reviewers will help you, and it will help your classmates get better at providing feedback.

Create an abstract of your argument

Even if it is not required in your class, the challenge of writing an abstract—a brief statement that articulates your major claim, the method of your argument, and the significance of your ideas—will help you focus on what you are trying to accomplish in your writing. Can you explain what you are trying to argue and the reasons for your claim? Can you state succinctly the stakes of your argument? Writing this down can be a helpful reminder to yourself about the aims of your paper.

Test feedback against original goals

It would also be a good idea to test the feedback you have received against the original goals you might have set for your project. What claim did you set out to argue? Does your claim still hold in light of new evidence or does it need to be adjusted? What gaps do you still need to fill in your thinking and reasoning? What aspects of your writing need to be clarified or explained?

Create a reverse outline of your essay

Creating a reverse outline involves re-reading your work and writing out what each section and/or paragraph does in your argument. Having an outline of the argument as it exists will help you measure the current draft against your original goals and the feedback you have received.

Do not be discouraged by feedback

Receiving feedback on your written work can feel deeply personal, but it is important to know that it is **not an evaluation of who you are as a person**, the effort you expend, or even the kind of scholar you will become. If you believe that successful writers get it right the first time, that is simply not true. So, use feedback as new lens for your argument and as a reminder of the need to consider your readers as you write. Remember that feedback is one part of the dialogue between you and your readers, and it is an opportunity for you to develop new approaches and new ideas for your writing.

My Revision Plan

"In revising, the changes you make to a text are *connected*. They form a *plan of work*. For instance, if in reworking the introduction to an essay, you realize that you need to change the order of the paragraphs that follow it, then you are revising. Or if dealing with a new example also requires you to adjust some of your key words or concepts, you are revising. Or if in re-thinking the implications of your argument at the end of the essay, you also begin to see a stronger way of beginning it, you are revising."

— Joseph Harris, *Rewriting: How to do Things with Texts*, 103

Write brief responses to the questions below to help you determine what aspects of your paper you need to prioritize in the revision. Consider how you might clarify your position on your topic (your claim), define your relationship to other scholars in the conversation, and explain the significance of your ideas. Start re-envisioning your argument and think about how the changes you plan to make might affect your argument as a whole.

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What's my project? (What do I want to accomplish in my essay? Articulate a stance or position. What will I argue?)

What works? How can I build on the strengths of my draft?

What else might be said about my topic? (How might I acknowledge other views and possibilities?)

What's next? (What are the implications of what I have to say?)

Based on feedback from my peers and instructor, what do I need to prioritize in the next version of your essay?

Adapted from Joseph Harris. *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*. Boulder, Colorado: University of Colorado Press, 2017.