The Essay Guide: Revising and Redrafting

RR1 Revising and Redrafting

Your tutor will try to identify both strengths and weaknesses when reading your essay. Be aware that:

- The positive features of your essay are probably not as clear to your reader as they are to you.
- Mistakes and faults are bound to be more obvious to your reader than they are to you.

It is at the revision / redrafting stage that you can clarify what you most want to say (what is most worth saying tends to be what is most difficult to say); also, this is the time when you can work on accuracy and make any final corrections and improvements. Leave time for this essential stage!

Correction

These are some areas to concentrate on when checking your essay:

1. Layout / referencing conventions [see chapter 4]
2. Written accuracy (spelling, grammar, sentence construction [see 5.1]
3. Vocabulary (right meaning, sufficiently precise, appropriate to task and subject area)

*For most people, it is much easier to spot mistakes when reading from a paper copy than off the screen.*

The before and after texts below show the level of improvement that can come with careful editing. It’s good advice to leave the work for a day or two so you can come back to it with fresh eyes. Getting a colleague or friend whose opinion you trust to look at the writing and point out where what you’re saying isn’t clear can also help. (Don’t let anyone else tell you how you should have written the essay though.) This is an extract from an essay that needs editing:

I’m going to focus my attention on X Radios running order first, after listening to the three shows from X Radio. The main contributes to the running order was the advert breaks, the Music, the Weather, the Presenter, and Traffic and Travel. Analysing the advert break each, advert break lasted from six to seven minutes not only that, in each advert break there were up to ten to fifteen ads running. I also found that the quality of production that went into
making the adverts was poor. They were very hard to understand not well produced and heard to hear. The creative side of making the adverts were poor, dull and not exciting.

And this is the edited version:

Having listened to and recorded three shows from X Radio, I noticed how important advertisements are to the running order. The main content was provided by the presenter, music, weather forecasts, traffic and travel information and advert breaks; ad breaks were 6 to 7 minutes long and contained 10 to 15 ads. The production level of the advertisements themselves was rather poor: the sound quality was so bad that it was not always possible to understand them. Also, perhaps because of the short time of each, they were loud, formulaic and unimaginative. In this way, the ads made the station much less enjoyable to listen to.

The edited version is so much clearer: it uses language much more carefully and avoids misleading statements and unsupported statements of opinion.

Clarifying your argument

Sometimes, it is far better to rewrite a section from scratch rather than tinkering with individual words and phrases. This may be the case if you have written a paragraph quickly in order to get the ideas down, but find later that it needs polishing – to flow better and to be in a more appropriate academic style.

The idea of having people phoning and texting in their votes each week was put together off the back of a rise in mobile phone ownership and they then set about getting the disposable income youngsters would normally spend on cd’s each week and get them to spend the money on phone credit to vote for their favourite acts for which the programme got a percentage and made profit off of playing on the fact that the fans had to vote each week if they wanted to see their idol next week.

A good technique for re-writing is to take a paragraph like the one above, extract the main points

- Mobile phone ownership allowed audience interaction via text messages.
- Young audience transferred spending from CDs to text messages.
- Profit was generated through texting / phone messages.
- Programme structure encouraged repeat voting throughout series.

then rewrite from scratch, possibly reordering the main points:

Reality TV had acquired a new source of revenue: telephone voting. This was especially profitable as almost all teenagers (a core audience group) had mobile phones and could be
persuaded to divert their funds from CD purchases to text messages to support their idol. The structure of the competition (with evictions each week) ensured that income from voting would be maintained.

Referring back to the question / brief
If, on rereading your essay, you see that your line of argument has wandered from the question or central thesis, you should edit, rephrase, or reject these parts [see 3.3, 3.4 for further explanation]. Most often, the point made is valid and sufficient evidence is provided, but the writer hasn’t managed to explain its relevance to the argument.

During editing you will find places in your essay where you have not explained the relevance of your material – often because the *general* connection to the question is obvious. It is when you force yourself to explain the importance of a point that the best analysis occurs; new ideas can occur to you at this stage.

Moving sections of your essay
It is possible that once you have finished writing the first draft, you decide it would make more sense if a section was moved elsewhere. Also, within sections you might want to reorder the points you make, put a quotation somewhere else and move an argument to where it would be more effective. This is a useful and constructive editing process; word-processing makes it easy to cut and paste.

However, you should be aware that doing this will then require careful re-reading and some rewriting to smooth out the new shape of the essay. If you are not careful, quotations can be separated from their explanation, paragraphs can seem not to follow the previous ones and arguments can be cut in half so they finish before they begin; you can end up with a weaker essay than before the changes. Always give your final draft a careful read, in a single sitting if possible.

Section Summary
Your essay may not say everything you think it does
Typos are more easily spotted when reading off a page than off a screen
Rewriting weak sections may be the best option
Make sure that you are consistently relevant