



Revising your text

1. Texts become good texts only through revision.

Nobody writes perfect texts straight away. All good texts originate from a process of planning, drafting, feedback and revision. Make sure you take the time to arrive at a good text. Include a revision phase into your schedule.

2. In order to revise our texts, we need distance.

You have fought for every word, and every word is valuable. So: Enjoy your rough draft and take pride in what you have achieved before you start revising. You should also take a break.

To be able to revise, you need to read your text as though it was written by someone else. Your reader does not know what you were thinking about when you wrote it. There are several ways to achieve a distance from your text – either through time that passes between writing and revising; or through a change of location by working on the revision somewhere else; or through changing the formatting of your text so it looks different.

Read your text out loud: Hearing is different from seeing, and you will notice things you might miss in reading. If you get stuck on the text when you read it out, take that as a sign that something in that particular place in the text is not quite right yet.

You should always print the text you are revising. This makes it more likely that you actually read all of it. Don't use a red marker to jot down changes. Write down everything you notice so you don't forget it. You can decide later whether you do want to change it or not.

3. Feedback on texts is a valuable help.

An actual reader, that is, somebody other than you, has the most distance to the text. Be brave and give your rough draft to someone who can give you specific and constructive feedback. Ask yourself beforehand what particular questions you would like feedback on, and let the other person know.

Let the other person explain your text to you without interrupting them to give further explanations yourself. Ask: What did you understand? What is my message? What don't you understand, and what questions do you have while you read it?

The responsibility for the text always remains with you, the author. You decide what changes you want to make to the text and what should remain as it is. You do not need to justify yourself to the person giving feedback.

Good feedback is a valuable gift. Make sure you express your appreciation and be ready to give feedback to others as well.



4. Higher Order before Later Order Concerns

Revision happens at many textual levels – from content revision to correcting orthography. No one can concentrate on all the different levels at the same time, so you should tackle them one at a time.

First you need to look at so called “higher order concerns”, that is, content and structure of a text. Changing “later order concerns” such as the particular wording, grammar or spelling in a rough draft which might still undergo significant changes is a waste of time. You should also let people who you ask for feedback know which level of text you are currently revising.

5. Core messages show whether content and structure are consistent.

Each text has one main question it wants to address; for every chapter and every paragraph, you can define a sub-question addressed in it. Identify these questions and the answers given in your text. Try to write down a question and answer for the entire text and every paragraph in a short and simple statement. These core messages, read one after the other, should give a comprehensible summary of your text and be in a meaningful order.

If you can't identify a core message for a paragraph, there is probably something about the structure of the text that is not quite right yet.

6. Now is the time to check if your text conforms to academic style.

Transforming a text into an academic text is primarily a matter of content: It needs a research question appropriate to the subject which is answered using appropriate data or sources and with the aid of relevant research literature. Nevertheless, there are also certain academic conventions you need to adhere to as well as a (subject specific) style.

Once the content and the structure of your text are consistent, you need to revise at a stylistic and language level. You can work with questions such as:

- Is my text factual and objective?
- Is my text concise?
- Is it clear which statements I am quoting from other authors and which are my own thoughts?
- Are the language and the stylistic level appropriate or is the text too colloquial?

7. Enough is enough.

A text is never perfect, and it could always be improved. However, every writing project also needs a clear end. You need to make a conscious decision when your text is as good as it can be considering your state of knowledge and your level of competence. You alone can decide how much time and energy you want to invest under the given circumstances – how much it is worth to you.

When you finish your text, finish it completely and don't be harsh with yourself if you think of things you could have written later on.