

General Guidelines for Revising and Editing Essays

Note: These general guidelines apply to the writing of a variety of genres or text types. The guidelines are designed to help students become thoughtful and process-oriented, rather than product-oriented, readers and writers. They are not meant as a strict sequence for revising and editing an essay.

Revision

Revision is the process of working with the organization and development of ideas (content) to make sure an essay is as effective as possible. Revision serves to clarify ideas, strengthen the organizing structure, and improve overall coherence.

Revision works best based on systematic feedback from others, including peers. As a result of this type of conferring, essays become more “reader based” because the author takes into consideration the needs of the reader as readers review and respond to each other’s writing.

Peer Conferencing

Working with their peers fosters your students’ metacognition of the writing process as they collaborate together to improve their writing. All students benefit from sharing their work during the writing process. To be most effective, peer conferencing needs to be an established part of your routine for class writing assignments.

For your students to use this process effectively, they need explicit instruction in peer-conferencing procedures and reviewer etiquette (i.e., how to respond to one another’s writing). They need to learn what to focus on when working together and conferring about their essays, rather than only editing for spelling and/or grammatical errors. High school students need to be held accountable for their performance as both a writer and a reader (peer reviewer) of essays.

Teacher modeling of the peer conferencing process using a sample (teacher-written) essay displayed for the entire class helps students to learn the procedures and appropriate responses and questions to ask as they meet to review each other’s essays.

Note: See the Peer-Conferencing Tool for specific questions that can guide students as they confer with one another when writing different text types.

Reverse Outlining Strategy

Before students meet with their peers to confer, it is often helpful for them to reread their essays and focus on the content. The reverse outlining strategy is one strategy that helps students focus on the development and progression of their ideas. It helps them determine if these ideas are clearly related and focused on their topic. The strategy includes the following steps:

1. Sit down and read over the essay one paragraph at a time.

2. Write a sentence in the margin that summarizes the point that you've made in each paragraph.
3. Now look at each summary sentence and ask yourself if it's relevant to your thesis and strengthens your argument. This is a good way to see if there are any unnecessary tangents (development is off topic).
4. In the end, you should have a good idea about what you've said in your essay and where you have said it.

Rubrics

Rubrics provide specific writing criteria for evaluating products and performance, as well as guidelines for students as they draft their own writing and work with peers to confer about their essays.

Well-designed rubrics are task specific and are used throughout the writing process. That is, they help students as they prewrite, draft, revise, and edit writing assignments.

Teacher and/or class-made rubrics need to be created for and incorporated in curricular-based writing assignments. Because this type of rubric is class and assignment specific, it reflects specific writing prompts, purposes, and criteria for your students to emulate.

When students use rubrics, they have the tools they need to become metacognitive writers who engage in a reflective, recursive process as they work—on their own and with their peers—to draft, revise, and edit their writing.

Editing

Editing helps to improve word choice, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, usage, sentence construction/boundaries, and grammatical errors. These conventions are important because they guide the reader through the text and help make the writer's ideas readable and understandable.

Editing essays typically occurs after the revision process of the content. Utilizing an editing Mini-chart (list of specific areas to review/check), students can self-edit their own essay and then confer with their peers. An example of an editing Mini-chart that involves both self and peer editing can be found at <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printouts/editing-Mini-chart-self-peer-30232.html>.

Self editing encourages students to evaluate specific features of their own writing, increasing their self-awareness of writing conventions.

The peer-editing step heightens the awareness of various print and grammatical conventions for the reader (peer editor) and the author.

Sample editing routines include the fishbowl and monitoring techniques.

Fishbowl Self and Peer Editing

Use a fishbowl technique to allow the class to view a self- and a peer-editing session. Give students each a copy of a sample essay (i.e., one you have written).

Have one student model the self-editing phase using an editing Mini-chart that is displayed for the class to see (i.e., via a document reader or overhead projector). It is helpful to select a student who has a good understanding of the conventions on the editing Mini-chart. This student works through the items as the other students observe.

After the self-editing demonstration phase is complete, discuss the process with the students.

Next, choose another student to serve as the reader (peer editor) for the essay that was just self edited. Have the two students sit in the middle of the class so that all students can see and hear them as they work through this collaborative phase of the editing process.

Discuss the process itself and how this type of editing can help both the author and reader (peer editor) improve their writing.

Monitoring Peer Editing

Assess students' progress in the peer-editing process by creating a simple Mini-chart. List all students' names down the first column and include a row for dates across the top.

Then, as you observe students while they are peer editing their essays, you can rate their level of effectiveness as editors and document their participation and involvement in the peer-editing process.

REFERENCE: Self- and peer-editing and monitoring techniques adapted from ReadWriteThink.org.