# Chapter 5: Revising, Editing, and Proofreading

## Introduction

Many students don’t differentiate between Revising, Editing, and Proofreading. What’s the difference?

Revision involves analyzing the global level and paragraph level organization of the document, and making changes to your draft on a global, paragraph, and sentence level to ensure that:

* The document addresses its purpose
* The document supports any claims its makes (main claims and secondary claims)
* The structure of the document is logical and supports the purpose and main claims

Editing involves looking at each sentence carefully, and making sure that it’s well designed and serves its purpose. Proofreading involves checking for grammatical and punctuation errors, spelling mistakes, etc. Proofing is the final stage of the writing process.

For example, you have submitted a manuscript of your research paper to an international research journal for publication. The reviewer will score the submitted manuscript according to the following codes:

* **Accept:** Manuscript is ready for publication as is.
* **Minor Revision:** Manuscript is almost ready for publication; the author should be required to make some small amendments. The amended manuscript may not be returned to the reviewers.
* **Major Revision:** Manuscript has significant scientific merits but requires some major changes or revisions by the author, and should be returned to the reviewers for a second review round.
* **Reject and Resubmit:** Manuscript has some scientific merits but some critical issues to be addressed. Most likely this will involve conducting substantial additional studies generating experimental or computational data to further validate the developed methods or demonstrate the values of the central idea.
* **Reject:** Manuscript should be rejected and should not be considered again by TBME for publication.

These recommendations are made on the basis of four criteria which are necessary for any piece of academic writing:

1. **Novelty** (new science or a new approach to established science),
2. **Quality** (technical content is accurate),
3. **Appropriateness** (a manuscript that is complete in and of itself, and a good “fit” with the transactions to which it was submitted), and
4. **Impact (**will the work have a significant impact to the field or just a incremental step).

As an academic writer you should make the necessary changes to make your manuscript acceptable for publication. For this purpose you will pass through the processes of Revising, Editing, and Proofreading.

Making Major Revisions;

Revision means “re-visioning” your draft. It is “big picture” work. Step back and ask yourself: does the draft you wrote respond directly to the assignment and its audience, answer the questions that were posed? Is the argument clear? Is it sufficiently complex? Check to see if any of the ideas need to be developed, and if you’ve articulated the relationships among ideas. See if you need to add further evidence or support. Revision can require adding material, taking material away, working with the big strokes of the paper. It might involve changing the order of paragraphs and re-crafting topic sentences/transitions. It may demand re-drafting the introduction and checking the conclusion to see what should be brought up to the front of the paper. All of this is when you “re-vision” your paper.

During major revision, take the following steps:  
  
**1. Confirming Purpose and Main Claim:**The first step in the revision process is to confirm that the draft actually serves the purpose outlined in the introduction.  In case the draft hasn’t done so, you need to either revise your purpose, or revise the draft so that it addresses the purpose.  While this may seem straightforward, it is very possible for goals to change during the writing process.   
  
If your draft is persuasive, then it will likely also have a main claim.  For example, if your purpose is to recommend a solution to a given problem, then your main claim will be to follow recommendations A, B, and C.  Even if your goal is simply to evaluate several options, you will be making claims about each of those options (i.e. one is best, or that there are certain advantages/disadvantages to each option).  During the revision process, ensure that your main claim is clearly stated in the paper (usually at the end) and that the paper supports that main claim adequately.  Each section of the paper should be doing something to support this claim.    
  
**2. Identifying and Checking Support for Major Claims:** The main claim of the draft will be supported by sub-claims; these will need to be adequately supported as well.  Ensure that you’ve provided sufficient supporting data (your own or from others) and explained how that information supports your claims.  For example, if your draft recommends a solution (its main claim), one supporting claim would be that Solution X has certain benefits.  In order for that supporting claim to be warranted, you would have to provide sources or data from your own work that confirm those benefits.  
  
**3. Check Against Your Outline:** Begin the revision process by comparing your first draft to your outline, and asking the following questions:

* Does your draft match your outline?
* If not, why not?  Is your revision to the outline warranted, or would your original structure be better?
* Where are the gaps in information in your draft; where might you have to add more information?  What information is unnecessary, or tangential?

After this stage, you may choose to move sections around, add or subtract information.  Essentially, you’re re-evaluating your original outline from a different perspective (after you’ve written the draft)  
  
**4. Identify and Evaluate Transitional Strategies:** Transitions are the points at which we move between ideas in writing.  They play a particularly important role in between sections and paragraphs, but operate within paragraphs as well.  At each section break in your outline, you should be able to identify a transition strategy. Some transitional strategies include:

* Logical: the last idea of the previous section/paragraph is the first idea of the next
* Phrasal: using explicit wording to create a shift in writing/develop a relationship between the ideas in the previous and next sections/paragraphs
* Structural: Using similar sentence structure to create a relationship between
* Verbal: Using key words to establish a relationship between sections/paragraphs

Checking for transitions is a way to evaluate “flow” or coherence of a document.  A transitional strategy is effective when it helps create coherence in a document – when it helps clarify the relationships between ideas in a piece of writing.  
  
**5. Checking on a Paragraph Level:** With each paragraph, you should be able to:

* Easily identify a prominent and accurate topic sentence (near the beginning)
* Identify the paragraph’s role in its section and in the document as a whole
* Identify an organizational strategy or structure that the paragraph uses to accomplish its purpose; assess whether or not that structure is an efficient one, or if there may be a better structure (See Writing Process / Rhetorical Structures)

Making Minor Revisions;

Collaborative writing

Collaborative writing refers to any written works which has been carried out by multiple people together (collaboratively) rather than individually. In a collaborative environment, each contributor has an almost equal ability to add, edit, and remove text. The writing process becomes a [recursive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recursion) task, where each change prompts others to make more changes. It is easier to do if the group has a specific end goal in mind and harder if a goal is absent or vague.

A number of authors have suggested various strategies for collaborative writing.

According to Lowry et al.,[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaborative_writing#cite_note-JBC_2004-1) there are five collaborative writing strategies:

* **Single-author writing** occurs when one team member writes as a representative for the entire team. Single-author writing usually occurs when the writing task is simple.
* **Sequential single writing**. In sequential single-author writing, one group member writes at a time. Each group member is assigned a portion of the document, writes his or her portion and then passes the document onto the next group member.
* **Parallel writing** is the type of collaborative writing that occurs when a group divides the assignment or document into separate parts and all members work on their assigned part at the same time. There are two types of parallel writing: *horizontal division parallel writing* occurs when group members divide the task into sections, each member being responsible for the development of his or her assigned section; *stratified division parallel writing* occurs when group members divide responsibility of the creation of the product by assigning different members different roles. Some examples of roles that a member could be assigned are: author, editor, facilitator, or team leader.
* **Reactive writing** occurs when team members collaborate synchronously to develop their product. Team members react to and adjust each other's contributions as they are made.
* **Mixed mode**. This term describes a form of writing that mixes two or more of the collaborative writing strategies described above.

Onrubia and Engel[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaborative_writing#cite_note-CE_2009-2) also proposed five main strategies for collaborative elaboration of written products:

* **Parallel construction—‘cut and paste’**. Each group member contributes with a different part of the completed task and the final document is constructed through a juxtapositioning of these different parts without the contribution of other co-authors. "Divide and conquer"
* **Parallel construction—‘puzzle’**. Each group member contributes with an initial document with the entirely or partially completed task, and the final document is constructed through the juxtapositioning of small extracted parts of the initial contributions of other coauthors.
* **Sequential summative construction**. One group member presents a document that constitutes an initial, partial or complete, proposal for the task resolution, and the rest of the participants successively add their contributions to this initial document, without modifying what has been previously written, hence, systematically accepting what is added by other co-authors.
* **Sequential integrating construction**. One group member presents a document that constitutes an initial, partial or complete task proposal, and the other group members successively contribute to this initial document, proposing justified modifications or discussing whether they agree with what has been previously written or not.
* **Integrating construction**. The writing of the document is based on synchronic discussion through the chat, with repeated revisions, where all group members react to the comments, the changes and the additions made by other participants.

Ritchie and Rigano[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaborative_writing#cite_note-RP_2007-3) described three types of co-authoring used in the academic setting:

* **Turn writing**. In this form of writing, which is more cooperative than collaborative, authors contribute different sections of a text which are then merged and harmonized by a lead author.
* **Lead writing**. One person drafts the text, which is amended by the others.
* **Writing together side-by-side**. A text is composed by two or more persons who think aloud together, negotiating and refining the content. One of the authors serves as scribe and possibly also as "gatekeeper of text composition".

There are several of degrees of collaboration inwriting. At one end of the range is a single author who through discussion with and review by colleagues produces a document. The other end of the spectrum is a group of writers who jointly author a document. Based on the results of the study conducted by Ede and Lunsford,[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collaborative_writing#cite_note-Sing_Plur-4) there are seven organizational patterns for collaborative authoring:

1. The team plans and outlines the task, each writer prepares his or her part, and the group compiles the individual parts and revises the whole document as needed;
2. The team plans and outlines the writing task, one member prepares a draft, and the team edits and revises the draft;
3. One member of the team plans and writes a draft, then the group revises the draft;
4. One person plans and writes the draft, then one or more members revise the draft without consulting the original authors;
5. The group plans and writes the draft, one or more members revise the draft without consulting the original authors;
6. One person assigns the tasks, each member completes the individual task, and one person compiles and revises the document;
7. One dictates, another transcribes and edits.

Results from the study indicated that the percentage of writing groups that use these methods often or very often ranges from 3% (method 5) to 31%. Ede and Lunsford also examined the level of satisfaction of authors participating in the group writing process, finding that satisfaction is influenced by eight items:

1. The degree to which goals are articulated and shared;
2. The degree of openness and mutual respect;
3. The degree of control the writers have over the text;
4. The degree to which writers can respond to others who modify the text;
5. The way in which credit (directly or indirectly) is acknowledged;
6. The presence of an agreed upon procedure for managing conflicts and resolving disputes;
7. The number and types of (bureaucratic) constraints imposed on the authors (e.g. deadlines, technical-legal requirements); and
8. The status of the project within the organization.

Revising Collaboratively;

The term collaborative writing refers to projects where written works are created by multiple people together (collaboratively) rather than individually. Some projects are overseen by an editor or editorial team, but many grow without any oversight. Collaborative writing is also an approach for teaching novice authors to write.

Revising in Digital Environments;

Using collaborative writing tools can provide substantial advantages to projects ranging from increased user commitment to easier, more effective and efficient work processes. It is often the case that when users can directly contribute to an effort and feel that they've made a difference, they become more involved with and attached to the outcome of the project. The users then feel more comfortable contributing time, effort, and personal pride into the final product, resulting in a better final outcome.

In addition, collaborative writing tools have made it easier to design better work processes. These tools provide ways to monitor what users are contributing and when they contribute so managers can quickly verify that assigned work is being completed. Since these tools typically provide revision tracking, it has also made data sharing simpler. Users won't have to keep track of what version is the current working revision since the software has automated that. Furthermore, because this software typically provides ways for users to chat in real time, projects can be completed faster because users don't have to wait for other users to respond by asynchronous means like email.

Others advantage is that since this software makes it easy for users to contribute from anywhere in the world, projects can benefit from the inclusion of perspectives from people all around the world.

It is important to point out that to be able to use collaborative writing in the classroom we need something to use with and for this we have "Wikis". They are an exceptionally useful tool for getting students more involved in curriculum. They’re often appealing and fun for students to use, while at the same time ideal for encouraging participation, collaboration, and interaction. Although the wiki software can be used in many ways, most wikis share some basic characteristics that distinguish them from other social and collaborative technologies: they are unique, collaborative, open editing, simple coding and evolving.

Editing;

You can begin the process of editing after you’re satisfied with the structure, content, and coherence of your document (as a whole and in specific parts).   
  
Editing and proofing both focus on the sentence level.  Editing is different from proofreading because it involves questioning and analyzing sentences, whereas proofreading only involves checking them for error.  When editing:

* Read each sentence carefully and identify its function in the paragraph; ask yourself how you might redesign the sentence to more effectively accomplish that goal
* Analyze the sentences that precede and follow the sentence you’re focusing on.  Are the connections between these sentences clear, or do you need to insert transitions between them?
* Evaluate the design of each individual sentence; in doing so, employ the following principles:

**1. Manage Sentence Length:** Short sentences clearly communicate individual ideas, but often leave connections between them unmade.  Long sentences make connections between ideas, but can obscure individual ideas.  Vary sentence lengths according to needs of section.  
 **2. Strengthen the Grammatical Core of the sentence (Subject-Verb-Object):**The subject (actor), the verb (action), and the object (what the actor performs the action on) constitute the grammatical core of the sentence, but the real subject, verb and object is often buried by complex or elaborate sentence structures.  Whenever possible: 

* Elevate the verb, so that the real action of the verb occupies the role of verb in the sentence (especially in passive voice).
* Find the real subject (the thing actually performing the verb), and allow it to occupy this role in the sentence

“Evaluation of the material was performed on the basis of strength, flexibility, and cost.”

In the above sentence, the “real action” is evaluation, but it appears in the form of a noun here.  The real subject of the sentence – the person(s) doing the evaluating – are the researchers, but they don’t appear in the sentence at all.   A revision which fixes both problems might look like the below.

We evaluated the material of the basis of strength, flexibility, and cost.

* Position the verb closer to the beginning of the sentence, because the verb is key to reader’s ability to process information

“The influence of physiochemical properties of microbial floc, namely extracellular polymeric substances (EPS) and hydrophobicity, on ultraviolet (UV) disinfection of sequencing batch reactor effluent was studied.”

In the above example, the verb doesn’t arrive until the end of the sentence.  That means that readers need to store three lines of information in memory until they get to this verb, which gives them the information needed to process the long noun phrase.

“This thesis studies the influence of physiochemical properties of microbial floc, namely extracellular polymeric substances (EPS) and hydrophobicity, on ultraviolet (UV) disinfection of sequencing batch reactor effluent.”

**3. The ASAP Principle:**Avoid elaborate sentence structure, unless necessary.  Good technical writing is always “As Short as Possible,” while containing the necessary amount of detail.  Cut away unnecessary phrasing whenever possible. 

It is evident that this thesis provides a foundation from which engineers may astutely intervene for the betterment of the circuit board manufacturing process

Yikes! If it’s evident, then you don’t need to say it.  And “astutely intervene for the betterment” of?  What about:

This thesis provides a foundation for improving the circuit board manufacturing process.

Editing Collaboratively;

Proofreading

When proofreading, you may want to try the following strategies.

* Read each sentence aloud as you visually inspect the spelling and sentence structure; sometimes, reading the sentence aloud will allow you to spot mistakes that your eye can’t always see.
* Allow enough time for several close readings of the text, with some break time in between to give you a fresh perspective on your document.
* Ask friends to read over your work to check for errors as an additional strategy; sometimes, outside readers can spot errors that the writer can miss.  However, don’t rely on this as a primary proofing strategy: your proofreader doesn’t have anything invested in your report.  You do, and are the one ultimately responsible for errors.
* Don’t rely on your computer’s spell check to correct all the spelling errors for you.  Why?

1. Because Canadian and British spelling standards are different from American ones (standard on most spell checkers)
2. Because when you intend to sue “through,” but forget the letter “r,” your spell check will not register an error.  (Can you see another small mistake in the above sentence that wouldn’t register? “Use,” misspelled as “sue”)
3. Because the spell checker cannot ensure that the correct ending (agreement) has been used.  “We ends the paper by . . .” doesn’t register a spelling error, but “ends” should be “end.”
4. And finally, because spell checkers often do not account for many of the specialized terms that are commonplace in engineering contexts – the spell check will identify many technical terms as errors simply because they are not in its dictionary.

* Don’t rely on your grammar checker to correct all of the grammatical errors for you.  Why?

1. Because the rules implemented in the grammar checkers are rudimentary and simple, and don’t always allow for complex sentence structures.  They may identify errors where there are none.
2. They often don’t catch simple and straightforward errors, such as the “We ends” example above (no error was reported by Microsoft Word).
3. Their suggestions will often substantially change the meaning of the sentences.

## Tips on Revising, Editing, And Proofreading

**Editing and Proofreading for Grammar and Mechanics** Proofreading and some types of editing focus on the mechanical issues within the text: spelling, punctuation, and grammatical mistakes.

**Revising and Editing for Cohesion and Organization** Do the ideas in each sentence flow together? Is there a clear logical flow from the ideas in one sentence to those in the next? Are there strong transitions between paragraphs that lead the reader to see the connection between them and/or the reason you have put the paragraphs in this order?

**Revising and Editing for Voice and Style** Who is the target audience? Is the voice of the text appropriate to its audience and purpose? Or is the tone too formal/informal?

**Editing for Sources and Citation Style** Have you introduced paraphrased material and/or quotations with signal phrases and cited them within the paper? Is it clear what information, ideas and words are yours and which come from sources? Does the list of sources follow the specified format (APA, MLA, Chicago) exactly? Do the in-text citations follow the specified format?

**Proofreading Techniques**

* **Take a Break** A pair of fresh eyes can catch more errors than a pair of tired ones.
* **Read It Out Loud** When reading silently, your brain can auto-correct certain errors. Reading out loud forces you to focus on each word.
* **Read It Backwards** When reading a paper, the reader can become lost in the content of the piece. Reading the paper backwards forces you to really see each sentence on its own.
* **Use a Straightedge** Use an item that has a straight edge (like a ruler or a book) and then read the paper line by line. This method also forces you to see each line and each sentence on its own.

PROOFREADING EXERCISES

Directions: Read this paragraph out loud and circle mistakes you notice.

Paragraph 1: It is very impotent that everyone proofreads there paper. When students proofreads there paper, they must take the tome for through examination off what they wrote. The must try too fin the hidden miss takes in the paper. If they doo knot fin the mistakes, then there paper will not red right. Everyone want to make a god impression with there righting. There is no substitute four careful editing off your on wok.

Directions: Read this paragraph backwards, meaning that you read the last sentence first, the next to last sentence second, and so on. Circle mistakes you notice.

Paragraph 2:

You must take the time to proofread your paper. It becomes dangerous when students put too much confidence in their computer programs many times the computer program will not be able to recognize all the errors such as run-on sentences. A common mistake made by writers is the comma splice, Microsoft Word will not catch every comma splice. When working with a grammar check you must not allow yourself to think that all of the editing will be done for you.