Understanding Revision and Editing

A Writing Resource created by Dr. Vidya Natarajan for The Write Place

Revising your essay means attending to overall argument, structure, organization, and often implies rewriting entire passages to improve clarity, flow, depth, and focus; editing is a more surface-level check, to ensure that individual words are well-chosen, and that individual sentences are correct.

Revision checklist (higher order concerns)

• Have you addressed the essay question or prompt? (purpose)
• Have you considered your audience (e.g., academic vs. popular writing)?
• Have you written a strong thesis? (an argument--not a question!)
• Have you defined your terms to help your reader follow your argument?
• Does each body paragraph have a strong connection to the points/ideas in the thesis, in the same sequence as the thesis?
• Have you done enough research? (Most essays would get a better grade by deepening their research focus and number of sources.) Have you added concrete examples?
• Have you begun with a strong hook?
• Have you written a good conclusion, adding richness to your ideas?
• Does your title capture the specific content of your essay? (academic essays often have A catchy title: A subtitle specifying what your essay is addressing).

Editing checklist (lower order concerns)

• Have you correctly paraphrased, quoted, or summarized from your sources?
• Have you cited each source correctly, and do your in-text citations match your Works Cited/References page? Have you followed MLA or APA format down to the last detail?
• Have you written clear and grammatically correct sentences?
• Have you punctuated correctly (including in your citations)?
• Have you spelled all your words correctly?
• Have you presented your work in the required format (MLA or APA) from the first page to the last?

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