

Revision, Editing and Proofreading:

What's the Difference?

Revision: Revision means “re-visioning” your paper. It is “big picture” work. Step back and ask yourself: does the paper 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 might be brought up to the front of the paper. All of this is part of “re-visioning” your paper.

Editing: People often refer to all stages of revision as “editing,” but formal editing is typically what you do *after* you revise. Editing involves crafting with a fine tool, and it leads to improved style and coherence. Here is where you consider your paper as a writer/artist. Try reading your paper aloud, slowly, in parts. Is the voice clear and confident? Is there a sense of rhythm and flow in each paragraph, each sentence? Do the sentences connect up with one another like well-constructed joints? Editing occurs when you correct any awkwardness that may have occurred in the initial drafting or in revision (revision can be very helpful to the big picture but create problems within paragraphs, for example). While you are editing, check the clarity/precision of your title and the accuracy of your reference or works cited page(s). Careful editing is critical to a polished, well written paper.

Proofreading: Proofreading generally comes last and consists of a final sweep through your paper with an eye for errors. When proofreading you make your final check for errors in sentence structure, grammar, verb tense and punctuation. You also look for mistakes in spelling, use of quotations, citation details, etc. It is important to check that your name is on your essay and it is desirable to number your pages or perhaps include a word count. This is your final read-through of your paper, your last chance to impress your reader and show your commitment to your work. Reading aloud at this stage or any other stage of the revision process can help you focus more carefully on your writing.