Once you have finished your rough draft, take some time away from your paper so that you can come back refreshed. Then you will be ready to see and hear your paper more clearly and finally sniff out any remaining mistakes. Please note that this handout discusses revision, editing, and proofreading as stages of a successful writing process, but keep in mind that these "stages" are recursive, meaning you can and should move back and forth between them as you see fit.

Revision It is not a coincidence that *vision* is contained in the word *revision*. At this stage, your job is to see your paper as a whole and to make sure that every aspect of it fits within your vision for your paper. To get started, reconsider your MAP for your writing project: What is your Message? Who is your Audience? And what is the Purpose of this project? (To inform, to persuade, to entertain, to express…?)

Then go through your paper and verify that each paragraph is supporting your purpose and message and that it is written with your specific audience in mind. Whenever you find elements that don't fit within your MAP, you need to either change them or cut them out entirely in order to avoid distracting or confusing your audience.

Be sure to also look for and fill any holes in your message and consider whether you might benefit from reorganizing. (The answer is almost certainly, yes!) Use some of the techniques below to help you make your MAP straightforward and detour free. The finish line is in sight!

Revision Techniques

Reverse Outlining (See Reverse Outlining handout for more detail.)

Look at each paragraph individually. Ask yourself, "What am I *doing* in this paragraph?" Then briefly write the answer in the margin or on a separate piece of paper. Once you've reverse-outlined the whole paper, look for holes, repetitions, and illogical organization, and make sure each paragraph corresponds with your MAP.

Scissors Technique

Cut up your paper so that each paragraph is separate. Lay the paragraphs out on a table and move them around until you find continuity. You can also try mixing them up and asking a friend to put them back in order. If your topic sentences and transitions are solid, your friend should be able to reconstruct your paper.

Zoom Way Out

In your word processor, change your view so that you can see all or most of your pages at once. Even if you can't read the text anymore, you will see headings, paragraph breaks, block quotes, etc. From this perspective you can get a feel for your paper's balance. To make this technique even more useful, try using the highlighter function to color-code your paper by premise or idea before zooming out.

Editing While editing, the primary aim is to assess how the writing sounds and figure out how to make it sound better at the sentence level. For academic audiences, especially, the goal is writing that sounds smooth and elegant rather than laborious. Again, editing can happen at any point in the writing process, but try to wait until your paragraphs are in place in order to avoid stifling your creativity.

Editing Techniques

Print & Read Aloud

Print your paper out and read it aloud to yourself or to a friend. Or have a friend read to you! What better way to hear how your paper sounds? As you read through, mark directly on the page. When you transfer your edits to your typed document, you'll have yet another chance to edit. In a nutshell, read it out loud, mark it up, edit, sleep on it… Do it again!

Highlight Sentences by Length (See Varying Sentence Structure handout for more detail.)

Varying your sentence length is a great way to smooth your prose. If you have too many short sentences, your paper will be choppy and stilted. Conversely, if you have a plethora of long sentences, your audience may get lost. To strike a balance, highlight all of your long sentences in yellow and your short sentences in blue. Spread your pages out in front of you, look at the breakdown, and adjust.

Eliminate Vagueness & Wordiness (See Eliminating Wordiness handout for more detail.)

Try to eliminate vague or unnecessary words and phrases from your writing all together. For instance, *this*, *thing*, *there*, *it is*, *kind of*, *really*, *basically*, and *certain* can almost always be omitted. As you notice patterns in your writing you'd like to avoid, make a note. Periodically search your document for those words and phrases by pressing Ctrl+F or Command+F and then eliminate or replace what you find.

Proofreading When you are finally done prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing, it is time to fix your grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling mistakes.

Proofreading Techniques

Glossing

Begin with the last sentence of your essay. Read the sentence by itself. Look for spelling, punctuation, & grammar errors and fix them. Continue backward through your paper until you hit your title. This technique tricks your brain into seeing errors it might otherwise skim past.

Specific Focuses

Focus on a different priority each time you read through your paper (commas, homophone errors, documentation, etc.). We're not as good at multitasking as we think. This technique takes time but is very effective.