# 017 Composition 07 - The Writing Process: Editing and Revising

Overview

One of the most crucial parts of the Writing Process is that of editing and revising your work. The word "revision" can be broken down into two parts—"re," which means to do again, and "vision," which means "to look at."

Revision, then, is the act of looking again at your work, changing it, and making it better and more effective as a piece of writing. Revision is central to the writing process. *The single most important thing you can do to improve your own writing is to become a stronger reviser.*
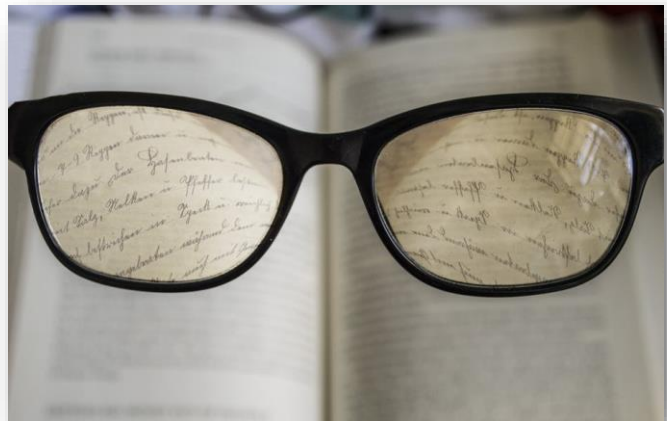
But what makes an effective piece of writing? For our purposes, effective writing means writing that is appropriate in content and form for its audience and purpose.   An email, Facebook wall post, or Tweet is designed to do different things for different people than say, an academic essay or an opinion article in a local newspaper. Revision is the act of making sure that the focus, organization, details, and language match the writer's goals.

In academic writing, the focus of this text, we should focus on revising our writing to make it appropriate and effective for an academic audience.   This means, in short, that the writing must have a logical organization, clear and effective topic sentences, relevant details, internal consistency, coherence, and adherence to the conventions of Standard English Grammar.

The Revision Process: Work Big to Small, Global to Local

In its earliest stage, revision focuses on the big issues in a paper. Is the overall point of the writing clear? Is the thesis easy to recognize and understand? Does the writing do what it sets out to do? Is it organized in a way that readers can follow it? Is there sufficient detail and development throughout the paper? Is the tone of the language appropriate for the paper's audience and purpose?   More narrow concerns, such as punctuation, tense, and other mechanical issues, can be addressed once the paper has accomplished its larger, compositional goals—these issues are addressed in the later stages of the revision process, editing and proofreading.

Revision is an intensive process that often requires, as its name might imply, doing and then re-doing once again. Many times, papers go through multiple revisions; professional writers are sometimes known to revise a piece of work *dozens* of times. Michael Crichton, a famous writer who wrote *Jurassic Park* and many other novels, along with the television show *ER,* had this to say about revision: "Books aren't written- they're rewritten. It is one of the hardest things to accept, especially after the seventh rewrite hasn't quite done it." Vladimir Nabokov, who wrote the infamous novel *Lolita* and many other books, once said something similar: "I have rewritten–often several times–every word I have ever written. My pencils outlast their erasers." Ernest Hemingway revised the conclusion to his famous American novel, *Farewell to Arms,* 43 times before he was satisfied with it.

Since you should plan to revise multiple times, it is often helpful to have a specific goal in mind when you start your revision. Focus on improving specific things for each pass you make at your paper. Remember this: Start big.

Global / Large-Scale Concerns Checklist

Thesis: Does my piece of writing contain a one or two sentence statement of its intended purpose? Can a reader easily identify this thesis? Is the thesis situated in an intuitive place in the introduction—usually at or very near the end? Is the thesis clearly worded and specific?


Audience: Does my piece of writing display an appropriate sense of the people that will be reading it? Have I chosen subject matter, level and specificity of description, and language appropriate for my audience? Have I considered adequately what my audience might and might not know about my subject ? Do I use any terms with which they might be unfamiliar? Am I telling the audience things they already know? Have I considered how my audience might feel about my subject matter? Is that feeling relevant to my larger point, and have I selected appropriate information / details to address those feelings or positions?

Organization: Essay-Level and Paragraph Level:

Essay-Level Organizational Questions: Does my essay as a whole proceed logically and transition effectively from one section to the next? If I am writing a narrative, does the narrative progress clearly through a timeline that is easy to follow / understand? If I am writing a

compare-contrast essay, have I used the block or Point-to-point organizational scheme? Have I followed that scheme appropriately and consistently? If I am writing an argument, has my essay followed and supported my thesis statement clearly and appropriately?

Paragraph-Level Organizational Questions: Does each paragraph in my essay serve a purpose that supports my overall thesis? Does each paragraph begin with a clear topic sentence that articulates that purpose? Does the information I present within each paragraph relate clearly to the paragraph's topic sentence?
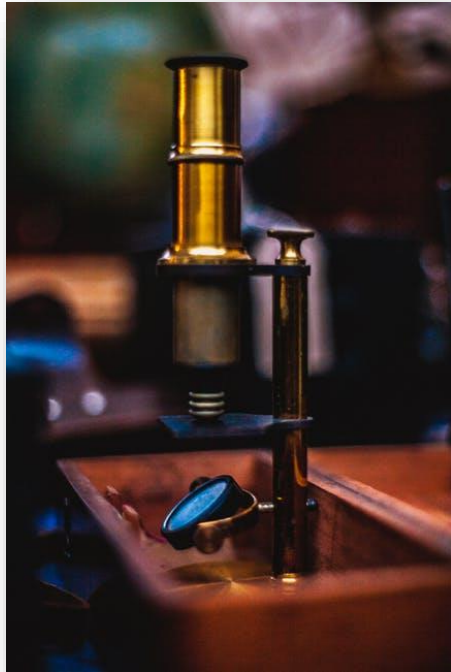
Details*:* Does my essay include lots of specific, concrete details, examples, and other forms of evidence to support my major ideas?

When the paper is narrating scenes, does the reader get a clear, specific picture of what is happening through vivid descriptions? Have I provided the reader with all the relevant information that he or she needs to understand the narration?

When comparing-contrasting, are the specific elements of compare and contrast explained in sufficient detail? Can the reader understand the specific elements of each item of comparison? ?

Has my argument provided evidence for my claims and warrants, in the form of examples, definitions, relevant facts, descriptive details, testimonials, or quantitative evidence, like statistics? Is this evidence clear and persuasive to my audience? Is the evidence relevant to their values and concerns?

Introduction and Conclusion: Does my paper's introduction and conclusion establish a clear sense a.) of the essay's purpose and b.) of the essay's *importance* or *exigence* for my intended audience? Do the introduction and conclusion remind the reader how urgent the problems discussed in the essay are, how important or necessary the comparison was, or how important the story is that was told?

Does the introduction contain a clear, easily identifiable thesis statement? Is that thesis located at the end or very near the end of the introduction?

Does the conclusion restate, using different wording, the thesis statement? Does it remind the audience of the paper's overall purpose?

Language, Tone, and Mechanics: Are my language, tone, and mechanics appropriate for my subject and intended audience?

Does the paper conform to grammatical rules appropriate for its audience? If the project is an academic paper, does it conform to the guidelines of Standard English Grammar?   See Chapter 05.5, The Writing Process: Proofreading for methods and assistance in finding and correcting errors in Standard English Grammar.

Peer Review

Perhaps the most important element in the revision process is a simple one: the reader. A good reader can improve a paper in ways that a writer could not even imagine on his or her own. In many ways, writers *need* readers to point out the strengths and weaknesses of the things they write. Often, writers are not the best judge of what they have put on the page; they often know what they *meant* to say, and their interpretation of what they see on the page is affected by that knowledge.   Many writing classes counteract this closeness on the part of writers by encouraging (or requiring) that writers exchange their papers with other members of the class, who will then offer feedback—most of the time, this feedback is very helpful.

The sheets below will serve as guides for peer readers to respond to, critique, and hopefully improve your papers in English 101.

Peer Review Sheet 1: Narration

Writer's Name_____   Reviewer's Name _____

Thesis and Purpose:
Does the paper present a clear statement of the paper's main idea and purpose?   YES / NO

If YES, write that thesis statement here:

If NO, offer more information on the problems you had with the thesis. Was it too difficult to find? Unclear? Too broad or too narrow? Not present at all?

Did the thesis appear near the end of the essay's introduction?   YES / NO

Audience
Does the essay have a clear sense of its audience? Of that audience's values?   YES / NO

If YES, identify a.) to whom the writing is addressed ("general readers" is too broad—be specific) and b.) what in the writing specifically appeals to that audience and their values?

If NO, what can be done to more effectively accommodate the paper to its audience?

Organization

Does the essay follow a logical scheme of organization—does the narrative progress clearly in chronological order? Does it use appropriate transition words to signal such progress? YES / NO

If NO, how could the organization be improved? What could the writer do, specifically to more effectively show the progress of the narration through time?

Detail and Development

Has the writer provided sufficient detail in the paper? As a reader, do you have sufficient information to understand the action and the importance of each part of the narrative? Has the writer described each part of the narrative appropriately? YES / NO

If YES, point out some examples of effective uses of description and detail in the essay.

If NO, identify at least one place in the essay where more detail and description could have been provided. Be specific as to the kinds of information you need as a reader.

Introduction and Conclusion

Do the introduction and conclusion of the paper establish a sense of purpose and importance for the paper's subject? Do they establish a sense of relevance and urgency for the paper's intended audience? YES / NO

If YES, what in the introduction and conclusion specifically creates a sense of purpose and importance for the audience?

If NO, what could be done to improve the sense of purpose and importance?

Mechanics and Language
Are the language and mechanics of the essay appropriate to its audience and purpose?   YES / NO
What about the essay's language makes it appropriate or inappropriate for its intended audience?

Identify the essay's main mechanical or grammatical problems in the space below:

Peer Review Sheet 2: Expository Essay

Writer's Name_____   Reviewer's Name _____

Thesis and Purpose:
Does the paper present a clear statement of the paper's main idea and purpose?   YES / NO

If YES, write that thesis statement here:

If NO, offer more information on the problems you had with the thesis. Was it too difficult to find? Unclear? Too broad or too narrow? Not present at all?

Did the thesis appear near the end of the essay's introduction?   YES / NO

Audience
Does the essay have a clear sense of its audience? Of that audience's values?   YES / NO

If YES, identify a.) to whom the writing is addressed ("general readers" is too broad—be specific) and b.) what in the writing specifically appeals to that audience and their values?

If NO, what can be done to more effectively accommodate the paper to its audience?

Organization
Does the essay follow a logical scheme of organization—does the expository essay progress clearly in relation to its thesis? Does it use appropriate transition words to signal such progress? YES / NO

If NO, how could the organization be improved? What could the writer do, specifically to more clearly follow the thesis?

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Detail and Development
Has the writer provided sufficient detail in the paper? As a reader, do you have sufficient information to understand the action and the importance of each part of the narrative? Has the writer described each part of the narrative appropriately? YES / NO

If YES, point out some examples of effective uses of description and detail in the essay.

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If NO, identify at least one place in the essay where more detail and description could have been provided. Be specific as to the kinds of information you need as a reader.

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Introduction and Conclusion
Do the introduction and conclusion of the paper establish a sense of purpose and importance for the paper's subject? Do they establish a sense of relevance and urgency for the paper's intended audience?   YES / NO

If YES, what in the introduction and conclusion specifically creates a sense of purpose and importance for the audience?

If NO, what could be done to improve the sense of purpose and importance?

Mechanics and Language
Are the language and mechanics of the essay appropriate to its audience and purpose?   YES / NO
What about the essay's language makes it appropriate or inappropriate for its intended audience?

Identify the essay's main mechanical or grammatical problems in the space below:

Peer Review Sheet 3: Compare-Contrast

Writer's Name_____   Reviewer's Name _____

Thesis and Purpose:
Does the paper present a clear statement of the paper's main idea and purpose—including the two subjects being compared?   YES / NO

If YES, write that thesis statement here:

If NO, offer more information on the problems you had with the thesis. Was it too difficult to find? Unclear? Too broad or too narrow? Not present at all?

Did the thesis appear at the end or very near to the end of the essay's introduction?   YES / NO

Audience
Does the essay have a clear sense of its audience? Of that audience's values?   YES / NO

If YES, identify a.) to whom the writing is addressed ("general readers" is too broad—be specific) and b.) what in the writing specifically appeals to that audience and their values?

If NO, what can be done to more effectively accommodate the paper to its audience?

Organization

Does the essay follow a logical scheme of organization? YES / NO   The organizational scheme for the Compare-Contrast is a (circle one): BLOCK ORGANIZATION / POINT to POINT ORGANIZATION

If NO, how could the organization be improved? What could the writer do, specifically to more effectively show the similarities and differences between the two subjects?

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Detail and Development

Has the writer provided sufficient detail in the paper? As a reader, do you have sufficient detail to understand the similarities and differences that the writer is describing? Has the writer made each comparison clearly? YES / NO

If YES, point out some examples of effective uses of description and detail in the essay.

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If NO, identify at least one place in the essay where more detail and description could have been provided. Be specific as to the kinds of information you need as a reader.

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Introduction and Conclusion

Do the introduction and conclusion of the paper establish a sense of purpose and importance for the paper's subject? Do they establish a sense of relevance and urgency for the paper's intended audience?   YES / NO

If YES, what in the introduction and conclusion specifically creates a sense of purpose and importance for the audience?

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If NO, what could be done to improve the sense of purpose and importance?

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Mechanics and Language
Are the language and mechanics of the essay appropriate to its audience and purpose? YES / NO

What about the essay's language makes it appropriate or inappropriate for its intended audience?

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Identify the essay's main mechanical or grammatical problems in the space below:

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Peer Review Sheet 4: Argument

Writer's Name_____   Reviewer's Name _____

Thesis and Purpose:
Does the paper present a clear statement of the paper's main idea and purpose, outlining the claim and warrants for that claim?   YES / NO

If YES, write that thesis statement here:

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If NO, offer more information on the problems you had with the thesis. Was it too difficult to find? Unclear? Too broad or too narrow? Not present at all?

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Did the thesis appear at the end or very near to the end of the essay's introduction?   YES / NO

Audience
Does the essay have a clear sense of its audience? Of that audience's values?   YES / NO

If YES, identify a.) to whom the writing is addressed ("general readers" is too broad—be specific) and b.) what in the writing specifically appeals to that audience and their values?

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If NO, what can be done to more effectively accommodate the paper to its audience?

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Organization

Does the essay follow a logical scheme of organization? YES / NO   Does the essay's introduction set up a "blueprint" for what is to come in the essay? YES / NO

If NO, how could the organization be improved? What could the writer do, specifically to more effectively show the progress of the narration through time?

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Detail and Development

Has the writer provided sufficient detail in the paper? As a reader, do you have sufficient detail to understand and be persuaded by the argument the paper is making? Has the writer provided compelling evidence to support his or her claims? YES / NO

If YES, point out some examples of effective uses of description, detail, and evidence in the essay.

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If NO, identify at least one place in the essay where more detail and description could have been provided. Be specific as to the kinds of information you need as a reader.

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Citation

Has the writer cited any secondary source material appropriately using correct MLA citation style?   YES / NO   Are there two citations present, as required by the assignment? YES / NO

If NO, identify places where the writer needs to improve / correct the use of MLA citation style

Works Cited
Does the paper have a properly-formatted MLA Works Cited page?   YES / NO

If NO, identify the incorrect entry or entries on the Works Cited or note that the page is "not present.

Introduction and Conclusion
Do the introduction and conclusion of the paper establish a sense of purpose and importance for the paper's subject? Do they establish a sense of relevance and urgency for the paper's intended audience?   YES / NO

If YES, what in the introduction and conclusion specifically creates a sense of purpose and importance for the audience?

If NO, what could be done to improve the sense of purpose and importance?

Mechanics and Language

Are the language and mechanics of the essay appropriate to its audience and purpose? YES / NO

What about the essay's language makes it appropriate or inappropriate for its intended audience?

Identify the essay's main mechanical or grammatical problems in the space below:

Peer Review Sheet 5: Writing Process Analysis Essay

Writer's Name_____   Reviewer's Name _____

Thesis and Purpose:
Does the paper present a clear statement of the paper's main idea and purpose?   YES / NO

If YES, write that thesis statement here:

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If NO, offer more information on the problems you had with the thesis. Was it too difficult to
find? Unclear? Too broad or too narrow? Not present at all?

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Did the thesis appear at the end or very near to the end of the essay's introduction?   YES / NO

Audience
Does the essay have a clear sense of its audience? Of that audience's values?   YES / NO

If YES, identify a.) to whom the writing is addressed ("general readers" is too broad—be
specific) and b.) what in the writing specifically appeals to that audience and their values?

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If NO, what can be done to more effectively accommodate the paper to its audience?

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Organization

Does the essay follow a logical scheme of organization? YES / NO   Does the essay's introduction set up a "blueprint" for what is to come in the essay? YES / NO

If NO, how could the organization be improved? What could the writer do, specifically to more effectively show the workings of the writing process in each English 101 essay?

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Detail and Development

Has the writer provided sufficient detail in the paper? As a reader, do you have sufficient detail to understand the writer's process in composing each essay? Has the writer provided effective examples of each element of the writing process for each essay? YES / NO

If YES, point out some examples of effective uses of description, detail, and evidence in the essay.

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If NO, identify at least one place in the essay where more detail and description could have been provided. Be specific as to the kinds of information you need as a reader.

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Introduction and Conclusion

Do the introduction and conclusion of the paper establish a sense of purpose and importance for the paper's subject? Do they establish a sense of relevance and urgency for the paper's intended audience?   YES / NO

If YES, what in the introduction and conclusion specifically creates a sense of purpose and importance for the audience?

If NO, what could be done to improve the sense of purpose and importance?

Mechanics and Language
Are the language and mechanics of the essay appropriate to its audience and purpose? YES / NO

What about the essay's language makes it appropriate or inappropriate for its intended audience?

Identify the essay's main mechanical or grammatical problems in the space below:

Revising Paragraphs: Building Coherence

All too often, we take the paragraph for granted, despite the fact that it is the building block of the essay. A good paragraph must possess "coherence."

According to most dictionary definitions, coherence means: 1.) logical interconnection; 2.) overall sense or understandability; 3.) the property of unity in a written text or a segment of spoken discourse that stems from the links among its underlying ideas and from the logical organization and development of its thematic content ("Coherence").

More generally, coherence refers to the understandability and logical structure of things that people build, create, say, or write. When writing teachers discuss "coherence," we focus on the conceptual and logical links between different sentences and paragraphs in a piece of writing. Writing—books, essays, or paragraphs—that is coherent is *logical* and develops in a pattern or progression that is easily understandable for the reader. The ideas in a good, coherent piece of writing are ideas that the reader can follow logically: the connections between each sentence, each paragraph, or each chapter should be clear and explicit.

The most important element of paragraph coherence is the *topic sentence*. The *topic sentence* is the sentence that connects all the other elements of the sentence. It is the paragraph's thesis. Paragraphs that lack clear topic sentences are automatically incoherent.

Analyzing for Coherence

Read the following paragraph carefully, examining how each sentence is connected logically to the one that preceded it. Can you identify the topic sentence? Where does the author introduce new ideas or shifts the focus of the paragraph?

Reality television is the worst thing ever to happen to the medium of television. It is inexpensive to produce, and as such, really popular with networks eager to make a quick profit. Shows that feature good, professional writing, established actors, and high-quality production values and special effects are getting rarer every year. Competition shows like *American Idol* and *America's Got Talent,* while admittedly showcasing very gifted individuals, also play upon viewers' worst qualities. Who hasn't watched the first couple of *Idol* episodes simply to hear some deluded amateur songstress horribly attempt to screech out a Christina Aguilera song? It's hilarious, but also mean. Horrible shows like *The Jersey Shore* and *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills,* and *Keeping up with the Kardashians,* are the fast food of the television landscape. Extremely cheap and easy to "crank out," they take little effort to create and sustain, and they teach us nothing except how terrible, petty, or mean people can be toward each other. Exceptional scripted dramas like *Mad Men, The Wire, Lost, The West Wing* or even *L.A. Law* or *Hill Street Blues* are now hard to find, often banished to small cable networks like AMC or FX, where fewer and fewer people will ever get to see them.   Now all we get to see on television are horrible rich snobs, violent, drunken idiots on a perpetual vacation, and various mildly amusing bakers who specialize in seven-foot tall cakes.   What happened?

This paragraph contains a lot of evidence, a lot of detail, and even some strong critical thinking skills. BUT, the ideas within the paragraph are not organized in a logically coherent way: it jumps around and shifts focus. It starts with a strong idea, in the form of its *topic sentence,* which is clear and direct:

> Reality television is the worst thing ever to happen to the medium of television.

But the next sentence talks about the finances and popularity of producing a reality TV show:

> It is inexpensive to produce, and as such, really popular with networks eager to make a quick profit.

And the third sentence in the paragraph reports that "traditional" scripted shows are now harder to find:

> Shows that feature good, professional writing, established actors, and high-quality production values and special effects are getting rarer every year.

Up to this point in the paragraph, we readers are expecting to be told that the ease and cheapness of reality shows are pushing networks to produce more of them, at the expense of really good (and more expensive) dramas and comedies.   Starting with the paragraph's fourth sentence, the focus of the paragraph shifts. It now is asserting that reality television is bad for us as human beings—the focus is no longer on "good" shows getting pushed off of television in favor of cheap reality shows:

> Competition shows like *American Idol* and *America's Got Talent,* while admittedly showcasing very gifted individuals, also play upon viewers' worst qualities. Who hasn't watched the first couple of *Idol* episodes simply to hear some deluded amateur songstress horribly attempt to screech out a Christina Aguilera song? It's hilarious, but also mean.

The next couple of sentences push the focus back to reality shows as "cheap-and-easy" mindless television:

> Horrible shows like *The Jersey Shore, The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills,* and *Keeping up with the Kardashians,* are the fast food of the television landscape. Extremely cheap and easy to "crank out," they take little effort to create and sustain, and they teach us nothing except how terrible, petty, or mean people can be toward each other.

This passage fits more directly with the original intent of the paragraph as developed in the first couple of sentences.   The next sentences pursue the idea of the negative effects on the quality of television shows:

> Exceptional scripted dramas like *Mad Men, The Wire, Lost, The West Wing* or even *L.A. Law* or *Hill Street Blues* are now hard to find, often banished to small cable networks like AMC or FX, where fewer and fewer people will ever get to see them.

The last two sentences are a bit vague, and could be made to fit more effectively with the paragraph as a whole:

> Now all we get to see on television are horrible rich snobs, violent, drunken idiots on a perpetual vacation, and various mildly amusing bakers who specialize in seven-foot tall cakes. What happened?

The end result is a paragraph that contains a lot of good information, but lacks coherence. While staying on the paragraph's general topic of reality television being a bad thing, it jumps around from one reason to another in explaining why it is bad. While every sentence is related to the paragraph's topic sentence, the logical "flow" of the paragraph is hard to follow because the writer shifts his focus between two sub-ideas: reality television pushing better fare off the airwaves, and reality television being mindless drivel that plays upon its viewers' worst impulses.   Thus, the paragraph is not nearly as coherent and effective as it could be through judicious revision.

Improving Coherence

There are several ways to build coherence in a paragraph, but the most important one is this: *first know the overall goal of the paragraph, or what you want it to accomplish.* This is part of the problem with the reality television example above. The writer definitely has a strong view on the rotten nature of reality television, but the reasons *why* he thinks reality television is so bad are not well coordinated. The passage addresses two points: that cheap and easy reality television pushes out "quality" scripted shows, and that reality shows play on their viewers' worst qualities and contribute nothing to society. The question a good reviser would ask is: how do these two ideas relate? One answer would be that they are simply two *reasons* why the overall assertion of the paragraph is valid. But what is the most logical way to make this point? Which bad part of reality television should be addressed first? Can we add things or rearrange the paragraph to make it cohere more logically? One model would be the following:

(1) Topic sentence: Reality television is the worst thing ever to happen to the medium of television.

(2) **New organizing sentence**: This is true for two reasons: reality television is superficial entertainment that plays upon its viewers' worst qualities, and because it is so cheap and profitable to produce, it pushes more expensive quality television off the airwaves.

A sentence like this sets up the logical structure of the paragraph to follow, preparing the reader to hear—in order—exactly *how* reality television is the worst thing to happen to the medium of television; it narrows and clarifies the topic sentence. Once we have a narrowing statement like this, we can then move on to talking about each of our own main points in turn.

(3) **Rearranged / moved sentence**. Horrible shows like *The Jersey Shore* and *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills,* and *Keeping up with the Kardashians,* are the fast food of the television landscape. Extremely cheap and easy to "crank out," they take little effort to create and sustain, and they teach us nothing except how terrible, petty, or mean people can be toward each other.

This sentence deals directly with how bad reality television is, both in terms of morality and quality. The next sentence supplies more detail, both qualifying (slightly backing off from) and supporting the main idea:

(4) Competition shows like *American Idol* and *America's Got Talent,* while admittedly showcasing very gifted individuals, also play upon viewers' worst qualities. Who hasn't watched the first couple of *Idol* episodes simply to hear some deluded amateur songstress horribly attempt to screech out a Christina Aguilera song? It's hilarious, but also mean.

Now we have made our first main point. We now need to add something to the paragraph to more clearly connect it to our second point—that cheap and easy reality television pushes good television off the air.

(5) **New organizing sentence**.   This mean-spirited "entertainment" has another consequence—pushing good television off the air.

> In this sentence, we transition between the two related ideas in the paragraph, setting up a logical relation between the two concepts; good television going away is a *consequence* of the popularity of reality television. The next couple of sentences explain this logic:

(6) Reality television is inexpensive to produce, and as such, it is really popular with networks eager to make a quick profit.

(7) Shows that feature good, professional writing, established actors, and high-quality production values and special effects are getting rarer every year.

(8) **Rearranged / moved sentence**: Exceptional scripted dramas like *Mad Men, The Wire, Lost, The West Wing* or even *L.A. Law* or *Hill Street Blues* are now hard to find, often banished to small cable networks like AMC or FX, where fewer and fewer people will ever get to see them.

> This sentence (8), provides examples of the ideas introduced in sentence (7), and thus is a logical next step in the progression of the paragraph.   The final couple of sentences summarize and emphasize the paragraph's main points:

(9) Now all we get to see on television are horrible rich snobs, violent, drunken idiots on a perpetual vacation, and various mildly amusing bakers who specialize in seven-foot tall cakes.

(10)   What happened?

Tools for Building Paragraph Coherence[1]

Good writers use all kinds of linguistic tools for building coherence in their paragraphs. Among these are

1. Transitional Expressions and Logical Relations
2. Pronoun Use
3. Repeated Words and Phrases
4. Parallel Structure

Transitional Expressions or Logical Relations

Transitional expressions or logical relations are words and phrases that signal connections or specific relationships among ideas within a paragraph or essay, i.e., how the concepts discussed in the paragraph or essay fit together.

Logical Relation	Expressions that Signal Relation
Addition	also, in addition, too, moreover, and, besides, furthermore, equally important, then, finally, as well, further, indeed, in fact
Alternative	either…or, if only, instead, instead of, in that case, neither…nor, otherwise, rather than, unless, whether…or, or, in other words
Causation	as a result of, because, due to, for, on account of, since
Comparison	similarly, likewise, in the same way, not only…but also, as…as [e.g., as slow as a turtle]
Concession	of course, to be sure, certainly, granted
Contrast	but, yet, however, on the other hand, nevertheless, nonetheless, conversely, in contrast, by contrast, still, at the same time, although, despite, even if, whereas, by comparison
Degree or Extent	for the most part, so…that [e.g., she is so loud that she doesn't need a microphone], to some extent, to some degree, to a certain extent, such…that [e.g., it is such a long way that I can't walk], in part, partly
Example	for example, for instance, thus, as an illustration, namely, specifically, such as, : [colon], in that
Place	in the front, in the foreground, in the back, in the background, at the side, adjacent, nearby, in the distance, here, there
Purpose	so that, to, so as to, in order to, in such a way as to
Result	therefore, thus, as a result, so, accordingly, as a result, it follows that, consequently
Summary	hence, in short, in brief, in summary, in conclusion, to sum up
Sequence	first, second, third, next, then, finally, afterwards, before, soon, later, meanwhile, subsequently, immediately, eventually, currently

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[1] Elements of this section of this textbook are adapted from V. Zenari's unpublished "Writing Coherent Paragraphs" (2011).

Pronoun Use

Pronouns are one of the simplest ways that writers establish coherence in their writing. Words like *I, he, she, him, her, they, we* and *them* are more than convenient substitutes for proper nouns— they are also a means of building and maintaining logical coherence within a paragraph. Here's an example from a famous short story, James Joyce's "Araby," the story of a young boy falling in love for the first time:

> When the short days of winter came, dusk fell before **we** had well eaten our dinners. When **we** met in the street the houses had grown sombre. The space of sky above **us** was the colour of ever-changing violet and towards it the lamps of the street lifted their feeble lanterns. The cold air stung **us** and **we** played till our bodies glowed. **Our** shouts echoed in the silent street. The career of **our** play brought us through the dark muddy lanes behind the houses where **we** ran the gauntlet of the rough tribes from the cottages, to the back doors of the dark dripping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits, to the dark odorous stables where a coachman smoothed and combed the horse or shook music from the buckled harness. When **we** returned to the street, light from the kitchen windows had filled the areas. If my uncle was seen turning the corner, **we** hid in the shadow until **we** had seen him safely housed.

Even in a piece of prose as sophisticated and "literary" as this, Joyce uses the simple repetition of "we" and "us" and "our" to connect the ideas to one another. The reader clearly understands that the narrator is one of a group of children, playing on his street, with similar experience and viewpoints.

Here is another example, this time from a personal narrative—the use of "he" and "him" ties the ideas together here, even over two short paragraphs:

> **His** thundering rages are most vivid, **his** tears subtle. Watching and feeling for them, but unable to bridge the gap, I learned to love, hate **him** all in the same breath. No one ever knew this. They saw a kid in love with her **father**.
> **He** was a boxer when I was small. People say **he** was good and would have made it had **he** started younger, but **he** had a wife and growing family to provide for. Amateur boxing paid nothing, but **he** loved it. I think **he** must have been about twenty-two then. **He** claims that we were too young to have seen **him** fight, but I remember.
>
> From Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, "He Was a Boxer When I Was Small"

Read the following passage, and circle the most appropriate **pronouns** or **nouns** that promote a sense of coherence, order, and clarity in the text. Remember: pronouns refer to the *last noun* appearing in the passage before them. Make sure you select the words that offer the most clarity.

Some important problems with technology-assisted learning have been revealed by scientists studying the way people read online. _____(These insights / they) were detected using eye-tracking tools that analyze the motion of a reader's eye while he or she is reading text from a screen. _____ (Screen text / it) is, according to the data, usually read in a pattern that resembles a capital letter "F." Sentences at or near the top of a screen page are usually read completely, beginning to end. However, as _____ (The eye / it) descends the page, fewer words on each line are read and, eventually, _____ (reading / it) becomes an almost vertical activity. Indeed, web researcher and usability expert, Walter Conason suggests that "reading" is not an accurate description of this activity. _____ (The author / he) suggests that many web pages and PDF files represent "splashes" or "blobs" of content to users who will not read them with a significant level of attention unless _____ (the files / they) are first printed out._____ (The author / He) suggests that even a screen that looks somewhat like a book turns _____ (Users / them) away because_____ (the web / it) is not perceived to be a place for serious reading.

(Adapted from Bauerlein, M. *The Australian,* 10/8/2008.)

Repeated Words and Phrases
Writers often deliberately repeat key words and phrases to establish a sense of logical continuity within a paragraph. These repeated forms, appearing in multiple consecutive phrases or sentences, continually remind the reader of the subject of the passage.

Here is an example from Marie Nelson's commentary on the old-English epic story *Beowulf:*

But let us **begin** as Beowulf **begins**, with the situation in the land of the Danes when Beowulf **arrives**. As readers will remember, all **promisers** do not follow through by **doing** what they say they will **do**. As Hrothgar explains to Beowulf, who has just **arrived**, his trusted "ōretmecgas" often **promised** to wait for Grendel's attack in the meadhall.

Even if we have little idea what the passage actually means (it is a bit obscure), we can follow the basic logic of the passage through the writer's repetition of forms of the word "begin," "promise," "arrive," and "do."

Parallelism

To be *parallel* means, according to the Random House Dictionary, "having the same direction, course, nature, or tendency; corresponding; similar; analogous." In writing, this idea is shown as having similar structures repeat throughout a text, usually for some particular effect. Here's an example:

> Achilles was a brilliant leader, a fierce warrior, and a loving husband.

Each of the descriptions of Achilles here (the hero of Homer's epic poem *The Iliad*) are structured in basically the same way. Each entry on the list has two parts—an adjective and a role: *brilliant* leader, *fierce* warrior, *loving* husband. The simple pattern of these two parts is repeated throughout the list, making it sound even and unified. Here's another example, a bit more complicated (also see Chapter 05.3.1, Thesis Statements, for more on parallelism):

> To salvage our nation's reputation, resolve our political differences, and avert a financial meltdown, the United States must reduce the national debt.

Here, the three reasons for the writer's claim all follow a similar structure— "to do X," "to do Y," and "to do Z," we must reduce the debt. The same structure is repeated throughout the list.

The same principle holds true for longer pieces of writing. Parallel structures—think repeated *patterns* of words, rather than simply strategically repeated words (see above), can often provide a sense of coherence and unity to a paragraph (or even a whole essay).

Here's a short piece of a speech from Winston Churchill, the leader of Great Britain during World War II, discussing a massive defeat that his army just suffered in France. In this speech he is attempting to motivate his army to fight on despite their losses:

Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous states have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, **we shall** not flag or fail. **We shall** go on to the end, **we shall fight** in France, **we shall fight** on the seas and oceans, **we shall fight** with growing confidence and strength in the air, **we shall** defend our island, whatever the cost may be, **we shall fight** on the beaches, **we shall fight** in the landing grounds, **we shall fight** in the fields and in the streets, **we shall fight** in the hills; **we shall** never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and liberation of the old.

Churchill here uses many repeated structures.   The bolded parts above all contain "we shall" in some form—he uses this phrase eleven times in the course of this short passage!   Similarly, he repeats many parallel prepositional phrases—"on the X," "in the Y,"—in combination with this "we shall."   These repeated structures make it easy for the reader to grasp Churchill's emphasis. He is talking about a single subject – the need to continue fighting – and developing a *coherent* argument around it.

Here's an example from someone you might be more familiar with, Dr. Martin Luther King. This is an excerpt from his very famous "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered in Washington, D.C. at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963:

> Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.
>
> **But one hundred years later**, *the Negro* still is not free. **One hundred years later**, the *life of the Negro is still* sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. **One hundred years later**, *the Negro lives* on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. **One hundred years later**, *the Negro is still* languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In this passage Dr. King begins each sentence with "one hundred years later" and then follows it with "the Negro," and a description of the specific injustice that he is protesting. The repetition gives the passage a strong sense of coherence and rhetorical flourish. Dr. King does this throughout the speech. Can you see the parallelism in the passage below? What phrases does Dr. King repeat to provide a sense of unity and coherence to the speech? Underline some of them.

> As we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied, as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "For Whites Only". We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and

we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

And here's an even more direct example of parallel structure from the same speech:

I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; one day right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

Consider the sentences below, and re-arrange them into a coherent paragraph by re-numbering them in the space provided. Mark with an "X" any sentence that does not directly relate to the main point of the paragraph.[2]

____(1) Chocolate lovers beware: the seed of love, the cocoa bean, is threatened by disease.

____(2) "Overall production for 2004 is expected to fall 0.3 percent led in part by a decline of 2.4 percent in West Africa," said Bill Guyton, president of Virginia-based World Cocoa Foundation.

____(3) The traveling of diseases is "a very real possibility and the consequences of that would be close to catastrophic ... from the local farmers up to every chain in the chocolate industry," said Edward Allen Herre of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute.

____(4) The witches' broom, a deadly white fungus that deforms the trees, was responsible for almost destroying Brazil's cocoa crop in the early 1990s.

____(5) South America is not the only cocoa habitat threatened by parasitic infection.

____(6) Brazil now imports more chocolate than it exports.

____(7) The only solution to the dwindling cocoa supply is for scientists from all the producing regions to collaborate and find ways to make cocoa trees more resistant.

____(8) "It's only a matter of time before diseases like witches' broom and black pot rot endanger the global cocoa supply," announced Dr. Raymond Schell at a conference on agricultural science last week.

____(9) The top-selling chocolate item in the United States is the Chocolate Easter Bunny.

____(10) The decline is due to climatic change, political turmoil and disease.

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[2] The following two exercises were reproduced by permission of Prof. B. Schriner, Florida International University

Consider the sentences below, and re-arrange them into a coherent paragraph by re-numbering them in the space provided. Mark with an "X" any sentence that does not directly relate to the main point of the paragraph.

_____(1) We don't hang out with the same sorts of people, we don't live in the same sort of digs and the idea of dropping thousands of bucks on a handbag is beyond us.

_____(2) Plenty of investors, however, can relate to Martha in one area: She didn't follow her own best advice.

_____(3) In November of 2000, she emailed her broker saying she was nervous about the slide of the market and she wanted to take her money out of stocks and give it to a money manager; she never followed through on this hunch.

_____(4) A good money manager would have sold the whole thing.

_____(5) Martha does lovely arrangements with lysianthus.

_____(6) He or she would have put Martha into mutual funds and, considering her age and her already huge stock market exposure, probably put a lot of her money into bonds and cash.

_____(7) If Martha had followed her own instincts in November 2000, the ImClone affair, that led to her arrest, conviction, and eventual incarceration, would never have happened.

_____(8) What would a money manager have done with the stock portfolio of a woman on the verge of 60 -- a portfolio chock full of not just ImClone, but stuff like Amazon, Lucent, Doubleclick and JDS Uniphase?

_____(9) When it comes down to it, most of us don't share a lot of common ground with Martha Stewart.