
A Plan for Revising and Editing

The ProQuest logo is located in the bottom right corner of the header image. It features the word "ProQuest" in a serif font, with a stylized "Q" that has a long tail. The logo is white and stands out against the dark background of the image.

"If you try to write and edit at the same time you will do neither well" Sides, 1991

There's no such thing as writing...only re-writing." Steven Mintz, 2010

- Think of the first draft as the thing that gets you ready to write. It's a zero draft or rough draft, that no one need see.
- Now that you have words on the page, it's time re-think, re-organize, revise, edit, and proof.
- Some writers suggest that you take a break from writing (hours or days) before you return to revise and edit. (*Don't stop writing; just write on another chapter or project to give yourself distance. Must write, must write, must write.*)
- Get into revising and editing mode. Change locations. Print a paper copy and grab a pencil. Switch music if you write to music – anything to get in a revising frame of mind.

1 Re-think your project.

Given your data and findings, are there additional questions that you can answer? Is there a compelling story that arises from your fieldwork or archives research that needs telling? Do you want to expand your research scope and literature review to include these new questions, findings, and conclusions? (Maybe not. You can save them for your next project and publication.)

2 Examine your writing at a big-picture level – the thesis, conceptualization, persuasive arguments – that form the substance of your writing.

Have you made convincing arguments with your data and findings? Are your conclusion satisfying to you and your readers? Does your manuscript form a coherent whole (or do you find gaps that need addressing in some way?)

3 Examine your organization and transitions.

Does your manuscript flow, with the topics and themes in a logical sequence (or do ideas and sections seem out of place)? What about the flow from section to section, and from paragraph to paragraph? Do you need to insert transition sentences to help with the flow? Or are additional headings and subheadings needed?

4 Be a wordsmith: Read your draft to find the most precise and appropriate word in key places.

Read aloud, and if you pause in certain places, maybe you are subconsciously thinking there is a better word for that. If it comes to mind, replace it. If not, mark it and come back just one more time to let yourself consider if there is a better word. A “better word” can be more descriptive or maybe more precise. You may discover you can delete the entire next phrase or sentence – because you had written needless words trying to explain something that the more precise word now conveys.

5 Proofread for format, typos, and punctuation errors.

It’s easier to find these if you also didn’t write it and then read it dozens of times, so find a friend or colleague who will do you this favor.

ONE MORE TIP:

Decide in advance what you will try to do with each review.

Trying to do too much, or all of these steps in one revision, will increase the probability you will miss something.