



EARLY INTERVENTION

or

REVISING AT THE RIGHT TIME

Revising doesn't necessarily have to occur after a paper is written. Often, problems with a paper occur much earlier, and intervention at an earlier stage may prevent problems from occurring later on. Here are some stages in writing. Consider intervening at these stages so that writing will be easier for you when you do your final draft.

1. The assignment stage.

Do you understand what you are being asked to do in this writing assignment? Are there terms in the assignment that you do not understand? Do you know what outside sources you are being asked to examine? Do you know when you are expected to summarize material, when you are supposed to come up with your own thesis, when you are supposed to comment on the work of experts? If you don't understand the assignment, your paper may lack focus, and you may find yourself repeating vague generalizations because you're not really sure what you should be doing.

2. The research stage.

Do you know where to find material for your paper? Are you able to evaluate sources and to know which experts are considered authorities on the topic about which you're writing? Do you have enough material? Do you know when you can stop accumulating material and start analyzing it? If you tend to spend all your time researching, with little time left to write, you might want to check with your teacher about limiting sources for the paper. If you find that you feel as if you're drowning in citations, you may want to work with a detailed outline to help you organize the material you have. Problems at the research stage can cause you to write a paper that is merely a string of quotations, that does not leave you room for analysis, or that sounds too much like a high school report.

3. The zero-draft stage.

Some students find it helpful to think out their paper at the typewriter or computer keyboard. What emerges often is a stream-of-consciousness narrative of their ideas on a certain topic. Sometimes they repeat ideas, elaborating on them a little each time they occur. Sometimes they think for a while without writing, then write down an idea that is not logically connected to the ideas that came before because they fail to record their transition thinking. This thinking-on-paper stage is not really a first draft. It can be useful, but it requires rigorous

editing. Some students also find they can construct an outline from this "zero-draft."

4. The first draft stage.

Editing a zero-draft paper can result in a usable first draft. Some students can write a first draft from an outline or from a proposal. A first draft usually has the basic structure of the final paper. The paragraphs are logically organized and the sentences are coherent and clear. At this stage, you can revise for content and style. Are your ideas presented completely? Is there too much material anywhere? Is there material missing? At this stage, the Writing Center's hand-out on Peer Review can be helpful. It contains a check-list of criteria for a good paper.

5. The final draft stage.

Although it may be three o'clock in the morning, you are responsible for revision at this stage of writing. Make sure you proof-read, not only for typos, but for technical and mechanical errors. Read the paper aloud, or have a friend or room-mate read it to you. It's a good way to catch awkward or unclear phrasing. Line-editing still may occur at this (late) stage. The Writing Center's hand-out called "Ten Red Flags" may help at this point.