

REVISING YOUR ESSAY: A CHECKLIST

STEP 1: Checking for Overall Unity and Clarity

1. What is the main point of your paper?
2. Does the introduction clearly introduce the point?
3. Is there a thesis statement near the beginning (in the first or second paragraph) that clearly and concisely states the main point?
4. Does each paragraph help to advance your main line of thought? Does any paragraph digress from that line of thought?
5. Is your tone—your attitude toward the subject—consistent? (If not, you may want to reexamine your attitude toward your topic.)
6. Does the conclusion show that the essay has reached its goal?

STEP 2: Checking for Clarity between Paragraphs

1. Does the main point of each paragraph refer back to and help develop your thesis?
2. Are the shifts in topic from one paragraph to the next marked by the use of transition words and/or repetition of key words?
3. Does the break between one paragraph and the next always mark the turn of thought? Are there places where one or more sentences should be moved from one side of the break to the other?

STEP 3: Checking for Clarity within Paragraphs

1. Is the main point of each paragraph clearly stated in a topic sentence?
2. Are any of the paragraphs noticeably short? If so, is the brevity justified?
 - Should the paragraph be combined with another paragraph or developed further?
 - Are more specifics needed to back up generalizations?
3. Is any paragraph so long that a reader might get lost in it?
 - Should it be broken down into two or three paragraphs?
 - Are there needless generalizations, repetitions, or padding that could be cut?
 - Could any of the sentences be cut or combined to tighten the paragraph?
4. Does each sentence follow clearly from the one before it or from the topic sentence?

STEP 4: Checking Quoted Material (If not applicable, go on to Step 5)

1. Are there too many quotes or are your quotes too long? Do they crowd out your own statements or substitute for them? Could you summarize or paraphrase any of them?
2. Is each quote accurate? Did you mark any omissions properly, with ellipsis dots?
3. Have you introduced each quotation clearly and with correct punctuation?
4. Have you clearly acknowledged every written source that you used?
5. Have you used the appropriate format for documenting your quoted and paraphrased material (parenthetical references, footnotes, endnotes, a bibliography/works cited page, etc.)?

STEP 5: Checking Sentence Style

*Note: At this point, you may want to read your paper aloud.

1. Are your sentences varied in length and structure, or do they generally sound alike?
2. Are any sentences overly complex and hard to understand?
3. Have you overused the passive voice? Would some of your passive-voice sentences sound better in the active voice?

EXAMPLE:

- It has been shown by scientists. (*passive*) vs. Scientists have shown. (*active*)
- An award was given. (*passive*) vs. The committee gave an award. (*active*)

STEP 6: Checking for Sentence Errors

1. Does every sentence have a subject and a verb, or have you written some sentence fragments?
2. Does every verb agree with its subject?
3. Are there any dangling modifiers?

EXAMPLE: Flying over the farmland, the cows looked like ants.

4. Have you avoided sexist pronoun usage?
5. Is the parallelism in any sentence faulty?
6. Have you run any two sentences together without a conjunction (and, or, but) and a comma, a semi-colon, or a period between them?
7. Have you created any comma-splice sentences by joining two complete sentences with nothing but a comma?

STEP 7: Checking Diction (Word Choice)

1. Is the level of diction right for your subject and your audience? Is it consistent?
2. Is your language predominantly general? Could you make it more specific and concrete?
3. Are any of your sentences cluttered with unnecessary words?
4. Are your modifiers strong? (*Very, really, kind of, a lot*, etc. tend to weaken a meaning rather than strengthen

it.)

STEP 8: Checking Spelling

*Note: These are mistakes that won't be caught by a spell-checker.

1. Do you use the word endings *-es*, *-s*, *-'s*, and *-s'* correctly?
2. Have you confused any homonyms, such as *there*, *their*, and *they're*?
3. Are you unsure about whether or not to capitalize certain words?

STEP 9: Read the Entire Draft Aloud One More Time

Amy Lynn, February 1993

Edited and Posted by adam anderson 15 December 1998