

11.016J The Once and Future City
Spring 2015
Assignment Revision Guide

Assignment Guide: Revision
Due by class 26

You can choose any essay to revise for this assignment. You will probably want to revise an essay that you can see obviously needs improvement.

By class 26, you will need to submit at least three documents:

1. Your revision of one of the essays you wrote this semester;
2. The original versions, complete with all the comments you received;
3. A letter in which you explain how you revised your essay, and what changes you made both as a response to instructor feedback, your own evaluation of the essay's strengths and weaknesses, and the development of your ideas over the course of the semester.

Guidelines and Checklist for Revision

As you revise, first consider large-scale issues such as focusing your thesis and organizing the essay effectively. Wait to correct sentence-level problems. Use the following checklist to guide your revision process:

1. Overall, what do you think were the strengths and weaknesses of the first version? Make notes on this now so you can orient your task even while switching your attention to the micro level of your essay.
2. What feedback did you receive about the overall idea and organization of the essay? Do you need clarification on comments?
3. Now, look at the introduction. Where have you made your THESIS explicit? Do you need to focus on it more? Can you cut out some vagueness in your word choice? Check: have you expressed your thesis more effectively in your conclusion than in your introduction? If so, consider bringing the stronger, more specific statement into your introduction to give your essay the best possible set-up.
4. Sketch out a retrospective OUTLINE, i.e. outline the essay as it is, starting with its thesis and then listing each idea or point in sequence, paragraph by paragraph. Ignore any outlines you wrote earlier to help you produce the original version, because your aim now is to analyze and work not with those intentions but with the final product.
 - a. This retrospective outline should help you answer the following questions:
 - i. Are all your claims effectively supported by evidence?
 - ii. Are your observations fully explained?
 - iii. Are there places where the sequence of ideas does not flow logically?Then, use your retrospective outline as a starting point for a new outline that will incorporate all the changes in your thesis and in the relationships between observations and analyses.
5. Look carefully at the original essay's ORGANIZATION. Is it weak or erratic? Does it lack a logical flow or have weak transitions? The solution to these problems is usually to strengthen and focus the thesis. In fact, a weak organizational structure is often the result of an overly general or vague thesis – is that a problem for you? If so, rethink the way you have set up the thesis or main ideas in your introduction.

6. Consider the CONCLUSION: is it a clear reframing of your central ideas? A good conclusion places the thesis of the essay in a broader context, effectively offering a case for why the essay has been worth our attention. Is the conclusion fulfilling this function? Is it sufficient, or do you need to develop it further?
7. Do you need to ADD, OMIT, or DEVELOP any observations, claims, or evidence? Do you need to add or remove any photographs, maps, or other source material in order to strengthen your essay?
8. Have you clearly cited the course of every image and map in the essay?
9. Have you integrated sources effectively and correctly? Make sure that you use a signal phrase to alert readers to oncoming quoted, paraphrased, or summarized source material. "In *The Granite Garden*, Anne Whiston Sprin argues that..." is an example of a signal phrase.
10. Have you used CHICAGO STYLE citations correctly? Look at the link to the [Purdue OWL Chicago citation guidelines](#) as you make corrections.
11. Are your CAPTIONS correct and complete?
12. Do you need to fix any VISUAL elements or make any maps more legible?
13. Now make any necessary SENTENCE-LEVEL corrections, using comments as a guide. Also, check for wordy sentences, incorrect comma or apostrophe usage, and vague word choice. Make the necessary corrections, and use the Purdue OWL website or a writer's manual such as *The Mayfield Handbook* to review grammar, style, and punctuation rules if you need to. Make sure titles of long works (e.g. books) are italicized or underlined, and the titles of short works (e.g. articles) are indicated by quotation marks. Do not rush this stage of revision. Writers quickly lose credibility if they allow typos and other errors in a piece of writing. No matter how excellent the writing overall, careless errors always cost grade points.
14. Finally, READ your new draft aloud to yourself, to check for typos and other errors that your eye has not caught.
15. Most writers find it useful to have a peer read and offer feedback on their writing as a component of the revision process. In this case, you may have a meeting with the Writing Advisor at some point in your process. Bring to the meeting the original version of your essay, including all comments and feedback, plus any additional writing, drafting, maps, sources, photographs, or other materials that you will be using as you revise.

Note: Revising an excellent essay

If you received a high grade for the essay you intend to revise and you see few obvious problems that need to be fixed, you may wonder how to revise it. That's a good question. Writers, researchers, and scholars are frequently asked to revise or re-imagine a piece of writing for publication even when s/he might have felt it was complete, well-organized, and error-free. The answer to this problem involves about how you might challenge yourself to take the essay to the next level, however you might conceive that.

You could decide, for instance, to deepen your analysis on one aspect of your essay, narrowing its overall focus and developing a new version of your thesis accordingly. Or you might pursue leads and findings that you did not have time to work on in writing the first version. In any case, you'll probably find it useful to consult the teaching assistant or the professor to develop your approach to the revision.

Useful Links

[Purdue OWL Guide to Revision](#)

[Purdue OWL Guide to Chicago Style Citations](#)

[The Mayfield Handbook of Technical and Scientific Writing](#)

MIT OpenCourseWare
<https://ocw.mit.edu>

11.016J / 4.211J The Once and Future City
Spring 2015

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.