CHECKLIST FOR REVISING WRITTEN WORK

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Rewriting is the essence of writing well—where the game is won or lost.
William Zinsser, On Writing Well

[Revision is] an ongoing process of rethinking the paper: reconsidering your
arguments, reviewing your evidence, refining your purpose, reorganizing
your presentation, reviving stale prose.
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Writing Center, “Revising Drafts”

There is a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in.
Leonard Cohen, “Anthem” on album More Best of

1. Core idea or thesis for the document you are writing (report, memo, email, etc.)
   - In one sentence, what is my core idea? (And is that sentence in my document?)
   - Could I revise my core idea to make it more accurate, more precise, easier to understand, or more persuasive?
   - Could I revise the document to make my core idea easier for readers to identify and remember? (I.e., by phrasing it differently, more explicitly labeling my core idea as such, introducing the core idea earlier in the paper, or repeating the core idea more times.)

2. Argumentation/evidence (questions to ask about each major claim or statement you make)
   - Have I adequately explained this claim?
   - Would different evidence, examples, or arguments better support this claim?

3. Organization of the whole document
   - Could I reorganize the material to make my document clearer and easier to read?
   - At the beginning of each section, do I highlight for readers the key points in the material to follow? (I.e., provide an “internal preview” of the main ideas in the section)

4. Paragraphs (questions to ask of each paragraph)
   - What is the core idea of this paragraph?
   - Could I revise this paragraph to make its core idea clearer and/or to make the progression of information more logical? (Hint: You almost always want to write the core idea in the first sentence of the paragraph.)

5. Sentences (questions to ask about each sentence)
   - Does this sentence have a precise meaning to communicate?
- Can I rewrite this sentence using simpler language or grammar?
- Can I rewrite this sentence using more vivid or more precise language?