**Revision Strategies**

**Overview**

Loosely adapted from *The Curious Writer*, by Bruce Ballenger

**Kinds of Revision Targets:** When you set out to revise a draft, work from the larger issues to the smaller issues. Of course, sometimes these all need work, but it is still best to take them in this order.Below, possible targets are listed from most to least crucial. Note that they match most of the boxes of your rubric.

1. **Problems with purpose [connecting to the audience, response to the task/other text(s)]**: The paper fails to sufficiently answer the “so what?” question for the reader; the purpose is unclear or seems divided, isn’t linked to its context (“kairotic moment”) and/or the other reading(s)/writer(s) you are supposed to be responding to. Sometimes the paper fails to address the task as it is set out by the professor.
2. **Problems with meaning (quality/clarity of ideas)**: The thesis isn’t clear; or it seems too obvious, or what seems to be offered as a thesis is really just a statement of fact or a matter of taste, rather than something that is truly arguable.
3. **Problems with Information (development, support)**: The thesis isn’t supported with enough information or reasoning; maybe the discussion is vague because of insufficient details, vague or ambiguous use of terminology, or a lack of supporting examples; a claim seems weak because it is based on unstated assumptions that the reader doesn’t understand or share. Sometimes the main idea is simply asserted and repeated, rather than supported and developed.
4. **Problems with Structure (organization, coherence, fluidity)**: The argument might not flow smoothly from one sentence to another, or one paragraph to another because of lack of transitions; parts might be out of order due to unclear (usually unintentional) doubling back, repetition; details of chronology might be left out, even though what happened when is important to your topic; cause/effect claims might need more explicit details to link causes to effects;
5. **Problems with Sentence-level Clarity and Style (Control of Language)**: Problems with grammar, punctuation, spelling; sentence-level vagueness; choppiness, wordiness, inappropriate word choice, lack of control of tone, tangled syntax.

**Revision Strategies, Details**

**Problems with purpose [connecting to the audience, response to the task/other text(s)]**:

* To clarify your purpose (what you want your essay to accomplish, how you want to affect the readers), decide whether you want to open their minds a little, give them a new perspective, change their minds, correct a misconception, affect their behavior, or get them to take some concrete action.
* Then consider how you can make your audience care about your topic, connect it to a kairotic moment to emphasize its timeliness, connect it to your readers’ interests. One way to do this is to bring your audience into the conversation by responding to what others have said about the topic. You can also state why it matters to you.

**Problems with meaning (quality/clarity of ideas)**: To make your thesis both clear and compelling, you have to get beyond the most obvious thing anyone would say.

* Look for the most important line(s) in your draft, and see if it is clear and compelling.
* Consider feedback about your draft (if you’ve gotten a second opinion).
* Return to the invention stage, if necessary, to generate deeper ideas. Play the believing/doubting game to consider alternative perspectives. Free-write to dig new ideas out of your “right brain,” then judge the results.
* Do some research to see what others have said about the topic. Respond to any ideas you find provocative.

**Problems with Information (development, support)**: If the essay is underdeveloped, needs to be fleshed out, you have many options.

* Consider all the modes, decide which ones would add something useful: a story, an example, a definition, an evaluation, proposal?
* Present counterarguments to your opponents’ objections to your position.
* Provide background information that strengthens your argument or clarifies your position
* Give the issue a face by discussing a person who is affected, maybe yourself.

**Problems with Structure (organization, coherence, fluidity)**:

* Look for the backbone: the main structure of thesis + support. Usually the 1st and/or last sentence of any paragraph has the main idea of that paragraph, plus an appropriate transition. If not, make it so.
* To improve coherence, look to the transition points and be sure the transitions are appropriate. Transitions can be a word, a phrase, a sentence, or an entire paragraph. They should point back and forward, clarifying the relationship between known and new. Here is a good list of transitions, and advice on how to use them. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/574/02/>
* Put things in order. The beginning should hook the reader, lay out the topic/significance; the middle should develop and support the thesis; the ending should wrap it up, leave a compelling last impression, maybe point toward the future, what your reader should do with the new perspective or information. Maybe circle back to the introduction: finish an anecdote, answer a question, choose an option that you laid out there.
* Reorganize, if necessary. Sometimes it’s choppy because a part is out of place. Remember that readers reacts as they go along, so anticipate that. If you raise a question, answer it.

**Problems with Sentence-level Clarity and Style (Control of Language)**: There are so many ways a sentence can go wrong that this editing task doesn’t lend itself to bulleted lists, but here are some very general things to work on. See your grammar handbook for details on each.

* Cut clutter and wordiness; be concise. Don’t say “In light of the fact that” when you can say “because.” Sometimes whole sentences or paragraphs can be cut.
* Avoid the passive voice, as it leads to vagueness and wordiness, saps the energy of the sentence.
* Avoid cliché: Find a fresh metaphor or just say it simply. A dead metaphor or trite saying deadens your prose, makes your ideas sound commonplace.
* Untangle your syntax. Read it aloud, or have someone else do so, if you have this problem. Usually, the more your prose sounds like your ordinary speaking voice, the better.

**For Further Information**

**Below are some helpful online materials from the renowned Purdue OWL site.**

Improving Sentence Clarity <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/600/1/>

Mechanics (an overview of revising concerns, leading to more focused instruction on both “higher order” and “lower order” issues) <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/4/>