

and operating a jackhammer on a busy street corner, I would object. That's a lousy choice, and I wouldn't let anyone force me to make it.

When the mayor of New York tried to take the homeless off the streets, some of them didn't want to go. People assumed that the homeless people who did not want to get in the mayor's car for a ride to a city shelter *chose* to live on the street. But just because some homeless people chose the street over the generosity of the mayor does not necessarily mean that life on the streets is their ideal. We allow ourselves as many options as we can imagine, but we allow the homeless only two: go to a shelter, or stay where you are. Who narrowed down the options for the homeless? Who benefits if they go to a shelter? Who suffers if they don't?

Homeless people are not always better off in shelters. I had a conversation with a man who had lived on the streets for a long time. The man said that he had spent some time in those shelters for the homeless, and he told me what they were like. The shelters are crowded and dirty and people have to wait in long lines for everything. People are constantly being herded around and bossed around. It's dangerous—drug dealers, beatings, theft. Dehumanizing. It matches my picture of hell. From the sound of it, I couldn't spend two hours in a shelter, never mind a whole night. I value my peace of mind and my sleep too much, not to mention my freedom and autonomy.

When homeless people sleep in the street, though, that makes the public uncomfortable. People with enough money wish the homeless would just disappear. They don't care where they go. Just out of sight. I've felt this way too but I'm as uneasy with that reaction as I am at the sight of a person sleeping on the sidewalk. And I tell myself that this is more than a question of my comfort. By and large I'm comfortable enough.

The homeless are in a difficult enough situation without having to take the blame for making the rest of us feel uncomfortable with our wealth. If we cannot offer the homeless a good set of choices, the opportunity to choose lives that they will be truly satisfied with then the least we can do is stop dumping on them (?). They're caught between a rock and a hard place: there are not many places for them to go, and the places where they can go afford nothing but suffering.

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REVISING

The previous chapter took you through the first-draft stage of the writing process, when you have a chance to work out your ideas without regard for what others may think. This chapter describes the crucial next stage, when you actively consider your readers: revising to focus and shape your meaning.

Revision means “re-seeing.” Looking at your draft as your reader would, you cut, add, and reorganize until the ideas make sense on their own. Revision is not the same as editing. In revising, you make fundamental changes in content and structure, working below the surface of the draft. Editing comes later: once you're satisfied with the revised draft, you work on the surface of sentences and words, attending to style, grammar, punctuation, and the like (see Chapter 4). The separation of these two stages is important because attention to little changes distracts from a view of the whole. If you try to edit while you revise, you'll be more likely to miss the big picture. You may also waste effort perfecting sentences you'll later decide to cut.

Reading Your Own Work Critically

Perhaps the most difficult challenge of revision is reading your own work objectively, as a reader would. To gain something like a reader's critical distance from your draft, try one or more of the following techniques:

- Put your first draft aside for at least a few hours—and preferably overnight—before attempting to revise it. You may have further

thoughts in the interval, and you will be able to see your work more objectively when you return to it.

- Ask another person to read and comment on your draft. Your teacher may ask you and your classmates to exchange drafts so that you can help each other revise. But even without such a procedure, you can benefit from others' responses. Keep an open mind to readers' comments, and ask questions when you need more information.
- Make an outline of your draft by listing what you cover in each paragraph. Such an outline can show gaps, overlaps, and problems in organization. (See also p. 28.)
- Read the draft out loud. Speaking the words and hearing them can help to create distance from them.
- Imagine you are someone else—a friend, perhaps, or a particular person in your intended audience—and read the draft through that person's eyes, as if for the first time.
- Print a double-spaced copy of your draft. It's much easier to read text on paper than on a computer screen, and you can spread out printed pages to see the whole paper at once. Once you've finished revising, transferring changes to the computer requires little effort.

Looking at the Whole Draft

Revision involves seeing your draft as a whole, focusing mainly on your purpose and thesis, the support for your thesis, and the movement among ideas. You want to determine what will work and what won't for readers—where the draft strays from your purpose, leaves a hole in the development of your thesis, does not flow logically or smoothly, digresses, or needs more details. (See the revision checklist on p. 43.) Besides rewriting, you may need to cut entire paragraphs, condense paragraphs into sentences, add passages of explanation, or rearrange sections.

Purpose and Thesis

In the press of drafting, you may lose sight of why you are writing or what your main idea is. Both your purpose and your thesis may change as you work out your meaning, so that you start in one place and end somewhere else or even lose track of where you are.

Your first goal in revising, then, is to see that your essay is well focused. Readers should grasp a clear purpose right away, and they should

find that you have achieved it at the end. They should see your main idea, your thesis, very early, usually by the end of the introduction, and they should think that you have proved or demonstrated the thesis when they reach the last paragraph.

Like many writers, you may sometimes start with one thesis and finish with another, in effect writing into your idea as you draft. In many cases you'll need to rewrite your thesis statement to reflect what you actually wrote in your draft. Or you may need to upend your essay, plucking your thesis out of the conclusion and starting over with it, providing the subpoints and details to develop it. You'll probably find the second draft much easier to write because you know better what you want to say, and the next round of revision will probably be much cleaner.

Unity

When a piece of writing has unity, all its parts are related: the sentences build the central idea of their paragraph, and the paragraphs build the central idea of the whole essay. Readers do not have to wonder what the essay is about or what a particular paragraph has to do with the rest of the piece.

Unity in Paragraphs

Earlier we saw how the body paragraphs of an essay are almost like mini-essays themselves, each developing an idea, or subpoint, that supports the thesis. (See p. 28.) In fact, a body paragraph should have its own thesis, called its **topic**, usually expressed in a **topic sentence** or sentences. The rest of the paragraph develops the topic with specifics.

In the following paragraph from the final draft of Grace Patterson's "A Rock and a Hard Place" (pp. 59–60), the topic sentence is italicized:

The fact is that homeless people are not always better off in shelters. I spoke recently with a man named Alan Doran, who had lived on the streets for a long time. He said that he had spent some time in shelters for the homeless, and he told me what they are like. They're dangerous and dehumanizing. Drug deals, beatings, and thefts are common. Because shelters are crowded, residents have to wait in long lines for everything; they also have to accept being constantly bossed around. No wonder some homeless people, including Alan, prefer the street: it affords some space to breathe, some autonomy, some peace for sleeping.

Notice that every sentence of this paragraph relates to the topic sentence. Patterson achieved this unity in revision (see pp. 44–46). In her

first draft she focused the last sentences of this paragraph on herself rather than on the conditions of homeless shelters:

It matches my picture of hell. From the sound of it, I couldn't spend two hours in a shelter, never mind a whole night. I value my peace of mind and my sleep too much, not to mention my freedom and autonomy.

If you look back at the full paragraph above, you'll see that Patterson deleted these sentences and substituted a final one that focuses on the paragraph's topic, the conditions of the shelters for the homeless themselves.

Your topic sentences will not always fall at the very beginning of your paragraphs. Sometimes you'll need to create a transition from the preceding paragraph before stating the new paragraph's topic, or you'll build the paragraph to a topic sentence at the end, or you'll divide the statement between the beginning and the end. (Patterson's second paragraph, on p. 31, works this way, defining a good choice at the beginning and a bad choice at the end.) Sometimes, too, you'll write a paragraph with a topic but without a topic sentence. In all these cases, you'll need to have an idea for the paragraph and to unify the paragraph around that idea, so that all the specifics support and develop it.

Unity in Essays

Just as sentences must center on a paragraph's main idea, so paragraphs must center on an essay's main idea, or thesis. Readers who have to ask "What is the point?" or "Why am I reading this?" generally won't appreciate or accept the point.

Look at the outline of Grace Patterson's essay on page 27. Her thesis sentence states, "For the homeless people in America today, there are no good choices," and each paragraph clearly develops this idea: what a good choice is, whether the homeless choose to live on the streets, and why shelters are not good alternatives to the streets. This unity is true of Patterson's revised draft but not of her first draft, where she drifted into considering how the homeless make other people uncomfortable. The topic could be interesting, but it blurred Patterson's focus on the homeless and their choices. Recognizing as much, Patterson deleted her entire second-to-last paragraph when she revised (see p. 46). Deleting this distracting passage also helped Patterson clarify her conclusion.

Like Patterson, you may be pulled in more than one direction by drafting, so that you digress from your thesis or pursue more than one thesis. Drafting and then revising are your chances to find and then sharpen your focus. Revising for unity strengthens your thesis.

Coherence

Writing is coherent when readers can follow it easily and can see how the parts relate to each other. The ideas develop in a clear sequence, the sentences and paragraphs connect logically, and the connections are clear and smooth. The writing flows.

Coherence in Paragraphs

Coherence starts as sentences build paragraphs. The example below, from the final draft of Grace Patterson's "A Rock and a Hard Place," shows several devices for achieving coherence in paragraphs:

- Repetition or restatement of key words (underlined twice in the example).
- Pronouns such as *they* and *them* that substitute for nouns such as *shelters* and *residents* (circled in the example).
- Parallelism, the use of similar grammatical structures for related ideas of the same importance (boxed in the example). See also page 53.
- Transitions that clearly link the parts of sentences and whole sentences (underlined once in the example). Transitions may indicate time (*later, soon*), place (*nearby, farther away*), similarity (*also, likewise*), difference (*in contrast, instead*), and many other relationships. See the Glossary, page 395, for a list of transitions.

The fact is that homeless people are not always better off in shelters. I spoke recently with a man named Alan Doran, who had lived on the streets for a long time. He said that he had spent some time in shelters for the homeless, and he told me what they are like. They're dangerous and dehumanizing. Drug deals, beatings, and thefts are common. Because shelters are crowded, residents have to wait in long lines for everything; they also have to accept being constantly bossed around. No wonder some homeless people, including Alan, prefer the street: it affords some space to breathe, some autonomy, some peace for sleeping.

Check all your paragraphs to be sure that each sentence connects with the one preceding and that readers will see the connection without having to stop and reread. You may not need all the coherence devices Patterson uses, or as many as she uses, but every paragraph you write will require some devices to stitch the sentences into a seamless cloth.

Coherence in Essays

Reading a coherent essay, the audience does not have to ask “What does this have to do with the preceding paragraph?” or “Where is the writer going here?” The connections are apparent, and the organization is clear and logical.

TRANSITIONS Transitions work between paragraphs as well as within them to link ideas. When the ideas in two paragraphs are closely related, a simple word or phrase at the start of the second one may be all that’s needed to show the relation. In each example below, the underlined transition opens the topic sentence of the paragraph:

Moreover, the rising costs of health care have long outstripped inflation. However, some kinds of health-care plans have proved much more expensive than others.

When a paragraph is beginning a new part of the essay or otherwise changing direction, a sentence or more at the beginning will help explain the shift. In the next example, the first sentence summarizes the preceding paragraph, the second introduces the topic of the new paragraph, and the third gives the paragraph’s topic sentence:

Traditional health-care plans have thus become an unaffordable luxury for most individuals and businesses. The majority of those with health insurance now find themselves in so-called managed plans. Though they do vary, managed plans share at least two features: they pay full benefits only when the insured person consults an approved doctor, and they require prior approval for certain procedures.

Notice that underlined transitions provide further cues about the relationship of ideas.

ORGANIZATION Although transitions can provide signposts to alert readers to movement from one idea to another, they can’t achieve coherence

by themselves. Just as important is an overall organization that develops ideas in a clear sequence and directs readers in a familiar pattern:

- A **spatial organization** arranges information to parallel the way we scan people, objects, or places: top to bottom, left to right, front to back, near to far, or vice versa. This scheme is especially useful for description (Chapter 6).
- A **chronological organization** arranges events or steps as they occurred in time, first to last. Such an arrangement usually organizes a narrative (Chapter 5) or a process analysis (Chapter 10) and may also help with cause-and-effect analysis (Chapter 13).
- A **climactic organization** proceeds in order of climax, usually from least to most important, building to the most interesting example, the most telling point of comparison, the most significant argument. A climactic organization is most useful for example (Chapter 7), division or analysis (Chapter 8), classification (Chapter 9), comparison and contrast (Chapter 11), definition (Chapter 12), and argument and persuasion (Chapter 14), and it may also work for cause-and-effect analysis (Chapter 13).

The introduction to each method of development in Chapters 5–14 gives detailed advice on organizing with these arrangements and variations on them.

When revising your draft for organization, try outlining it by jotting down the topic sentence of each paragraph and the key support for each topic. The exercise will give you some distance from your ideas and words, allowing you to see the structure like a skeleton. Will your readers grasp the logic of your arrangement? Will they see why you move from each idea to the next one? After checking the overall structure, be sure you’ve built in enough transitions between sentences and paragraphs to guide readers through your ideas.

Development

When you **develop** an idea, you provide concrete and specific details, examples, facts, opinions, and other evidence to make the idea vivid and true in readers’ minds. Readers will know only as much as you tell them about your thesis and its support. Gaps, vague statements, and unsupported conclusions will undermine your efforts to win their interest and agreement.