



Rowan University

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Revision Practices

Content in this presentation is taken from Chapter 8 of *Thriving as a Graduate Writer* by Rachel Cayley (2023)

Editing While Writing and Letting Time Pass

Try not to edit while writing.

Instead, when you notice something that might confuse you later, something that is incorrect, something that is missing, etc., make a note about it either in the text or in a comment bubble beside the text.

Let writing be exploratory, but don't leave yourself dead ends or mysteries that you have to unravel when you come back to the draft, hopefully after a little while as explained below.

After you finish a piece of writing -- a draft of a chapter, a literature review, a full paper -- let some time pass before you return to it. The longer you leave between writing it and revising it, the more you will have forgotten your reasons for making certain writing decisions, and the less precious you will be about them. You will be able to see the writing with fresh eyes, like a reader who has never read it before.

Use a Reverse Outline

Rachel Cayley in Chapter 8 of *Thriving as a Graduate Writer* gives a great explanation for how to work your way through a reverse outline, and why such a thing is useful when revising long pieces of writing, like chapters.

Your first round of revision should always be structural: *What is this piece of writing doing? What needs to happen in this piece of writing, and where does it need to happen?*

“By doing a reverse outline, you can learn what you *have* in order to reshape it into what you *need*.”

Reverse outlines show you the gaps in your organization, the balance of your ideas, and the any accidental divergences of your chapter’s focus, among many other things.

This is a time consuming practice, but following it will guarantee that you know exactly what is happening in your document and where, and is invaluable in figuring out if you are succeeding in getting across what you intended to get across.

Steps to Reverse Outlining

1. Number each paragraph

2. Identify the topic of each paragraph (be honest; if a paragraph has multiple topics, record that — this outline is only useful if it accurately reflects what exists in the draft)

3. Arrange these topics as a simple list (expect this list to be messy)

4. Analyze this list (note things like poor ordering of topics, digressions away from the key topic, addressing the same topic in multiple ways in different places; divergences from stated intentions, disproportionate attention to some topics over others, etc.; observe the logic of the organization — how have the elements been placed in relation to one another?; observe the proportionality — how much space is being devoted to each element?)

5. Rearrange this list into a revised outline (rework the logical progression of your argument and the way you have proportioned your text)

6. Reorganize the text according to the revised outline (this can be nerve-wracking — when reworking a text, be sure that you have saved a the previous version safely and separately, so that you are always able to refer back to it)

7. Check for topic sentences and paragraph coherence (after making all of these dramatic changes, your draft will be very messy, with topic sentences not following from previous paragraphs, and ideas referring back to things that haven't happened yet; read through the draft and address these issues as best as you can to establish basic coherence)