

UGRC 110

Academic Writing

Session 9 – Revising Your Essay

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Session Overview

When you revise a paper, you re-write it by building on what you have already done in order to improve upon it. Writers express thoughts in sentences and good sentences reflect clear thinking. Therefore you need not only know what you want to say, but must also know how to say it so that your readers can easily follow your train of thought.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this section, students should be able to

- revise their essays to improve upon them by:
- revising the content and the organisation
- using varied sentences
- correcting sentence fragments and run-on sentences

Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Revising the content
- Revising Organisation and Coherence
- Varying sentences
- Using Sentence Coordination Effectively
- Using Sentence Subordination Effectively
- Avoiding Sentence Fragments
- Correcting Fragments
- Avoiding Run-on Sentences

Reading List

- Read Units III & IV Of Meyers (2005) *Gateways To Academic Writing*



Topic One

REVISING THE CONTENT



Revising the content

- To revise the content of your essay, check to see if your paper is unified.
- First of all, check the introduction to ensure that your thesis statement is clear and that it summarises the points you have developed in the body paragraphs.
- Next, make sure you have enough body paragraphs to elaborate your thesis. These paragraphs must also include enough specific and relevant evidence.
- Build up your supporting details and examples if necessary.
- Below are two introductory paragraphs.
- ✓ Paragraph A is the original paragraph that lacks a vivid introduction, i.e. it fails to provide clearly the idea that the writer wishes to develop in the paper.
- ✓ Paragraph B is a revised version.

Revising the content

Paragraph A

I have watched many television programmes that supposedly show the way of life of Africans. My friends have often asked me if the way Africans are portrayed is true, and I have to say “no.” Africans are not as primitive and helpless as they are portrayed on western television programmes and movies; they are like any other modern people.

Paragraph B

When people think of Africa, they usually remember a group of people with primitive cultural practices, a disease infested area, a picture of a black-haired, dark-skinned, and a skinny child who is naked and walks barefooted. I often have to tell my European friends that the picture they get about Africa from television documentaries and movies is not true. Most Africans are not as old-fashioned and hungry as they are made to look on our television screens. Many people in Africa are like many modern people. They eat, study, work, have a social life, and dress as most people in the western world do; but then again, some of their customs may differ somewhat from that of the western world.

- Notice that in Paragraph B, important background details are provided as well as a clear statement of the central thesis of the essay, starting from “Most Africans are not...”.

Topic Two

REVISING ORGANIZATION AND COHERENCE



Revising Organisation and Coherence

- You need to take note of the organisation of your essay. Ensure that you have an interesting introduction, a complete conclusion, a clear method of organisation as well as transitions and other cohesive devices to achieve coherence in your essay for smooth reading.
- You can re-organise major sections for a more logical or more natural sequence. Use each major paragraph to move the essay a step further.
- For example, if writing an essay on ‘Ethnic Jokes.’ After explaining and illustrating the etiquettes of telling an ethnic joke (i.e. in the introduction) go on to develop the following topic sentences in their respective paragraphs. Study the sequence:
 - a) People should not tell jokes to put others down. [Paragraph continues to explain this point].
 - b) They should tell jokes only about their own ethnic group. [Paragraph continues to give reasons].
 - c) Some jokes about other ethnic groups are meant to be affectionate rather than demeaning. [Paragraph outlines the two types of joke].

Revising Organisation and Coherence

The sequence of the paragraphs is haphazard however. There is no logical progression from one to another. Re-organisation as well as fine-tuning of the points is therefore necessary to help the reader follow your train of thought. Consider the revision in the following:

- a. There are truly offensive jokes about other ethnic groups. [Paragraph continues to illustrate this type of joke]
 - b. There are affectionate jokes about other ethnic groups. [Paragraph continues to illustrate this type of joke]
 - c. People should tell jokes about one's own ethnic group. [Paragraph continues to provide reasons for the advise]
- The points have been reordered so that they discuss the undesirable side of joking about ethnic groups before turning to the desirable side. Thirdly on the basis of paragraphs 1 and 2, the reader is advised to avoid inadvertently hurting people from other ethnic groups by sticking to jokes about their own ethnic groups. The reader should find this sequence easier to follow.
 - In revising paragraph organisation, remember to provide transitions as bridges between them. As, transitional expressions are important cohesive devices.

Varying Sentences

- A sentence can be classified into four categories: simple, compound, complex, and compound complex. The basic sentence is a simple sentence, which contains at least a subject and a predicate (the predicate is made of the verb and other parts of the sentence).
- Use infinite variety of sentences to make your essays lively and interesting. Some sentences are short, stick to the essentials and make a single point. Other sentences are more elaborate, as they provide a full explanation and a range of supporting details.
- Revise your essay by providing sentences of different length and structure for emphasis and also to prevent your essay from becoming monotonous. Use a short topic sentence to open a body paragraph. You may then follow it up with a longer sentence(s) that fill in the details as exemplified below:

Newspapers often give a distorted view of life. They overemphasize the unusual, such as a mother's giving birth to a child on a tree, the development of a Christmas tree that grows its own decorations, sensational political pronouncements, teenage-alcoholism, and students riots.

- A short sentence is also often appropriate for summing up a key idea or for giving a piece of advice. It is often memorable and quotable. It can especially be effective if it sets off a key observation at the end of an essay.

Activity

Identify and underline the sentences that are clearer, more direct, and more effective in each of the following pair of sentences.

- As a doctor, one should demonstrate respect for a dying patient's wishes.
- A doctor should respect a dying patient's wishes.

- If people seriously look for work, they will usually find a job if they are willing to move.
- People seriously looking for work will usually find a job if they are willing to move.

- The applicants should complete all parts of the questionnaire.
- All parts of the questionnaire should be completed by the applicant

Using Sentence Coordination Effectively

- Whenever two ideas are equally important, use a sentence coordinator such as **and**, **or**, and **but** to join the ideas. For example:
 - We tried to locate the files but we were unsuccessful.
 - Agyeman is a professor at one of the public universities and Maggie works as a Public Relations Director at the Parliament House.
- However, excessive coordination will merely put a string of ideas together loosely. In revising such sentences, use modifiers and compounding to help explain the relationship between the ideas. This is exemplified by the following two sentences:

Using Sentence Coordination Effectively

- **Loose Coordination:** Fingerlings hatch a few days after the female salmon has laid the eggs, and they learn to swim on their own, and they head for the ocean.
- **Revised:** A few days after the female salmon has laid the eggs, the fingerlings hatch, learn to swim on their own, and head for the ocean.
- Note from the above example that, the revised sentence uses a series of verb phrases to link the various activities instead of clauses (sentence). It is only the last activity that is joined with the sentence coordinator and.

Using Sentence Subordination Effectively

- A subordinate sentence (also known as a dependent clause) is a sentence that depends on another for its clear meaning.
- Subordinate sentences are introduced by subordinators such as when, while, since, because, if, and though, as well as relative pronouns such as who, which and that. These add a dependent clause to a main clause.
- Sometimes, the dependent clause is only grammatically subordinate; it actually carries the main point of the sentence.
- Whenever sentences in your essay are too loosely put together, use effective subordination to show the relationships between them.
- You can use subordination to make main ideas stand out in a larger combined sentence by using the main clause for the idea that deserves special emphasis.

Look at how sentence subordination put the following disjointed simple sentences together to make a better reading:

Using Sentence Subordination Effectively

Simple The term democracy originated in ancient Greece. Different people have used it to describe different political systems. Often the person who uses the word thinks it has only one meaning.

Combined Democracy, a term that originated in ancient Greece, has been used to describe quite different political systems, but the person who uses it usually thinks it has only one meaning.

- You can also use subordination to elaborate and add more information to a sentence as shown below

Original Dr. Igolo was arrested and detained as a political prisoner for eleven months.

Revised Dr Igolo, who had been the director for the BNI, was arrested and detained as a political prisoner for eleven months

Avoiding Sentence Fragments

- The basic sentence is a simple sentence, which contains at least a subject and a predicate (the predicate is made of the verb and other parts of the sentence). In other words, every sentence must have at least a subject and a predicate to be complete.
 - A sentence fragment is a sentence that does not contain all the basic and vital parts of a complete sentence (subject and verb) or does not make a complete sense when standing alone.
 - A fragment is a sentence that is missing a subject, a complete verb or both. See the underlined fragments in the following two examples
- a) Stephen Appiah is a footballer of many talents. **Epecially his dribbling and scoring abilities.**
- b) I was tempted yesterday. To accept the irresistible offer.

There are two sentences in the example (a) above. The first sentence Stephen Appiah is a footballer of many talents is a complete sentence. The second part of the example, Especially his dribbling and scoring abilities is a fragment because though it has a subject his (Appiah's) dribbling and scoring abilities, it lacks a verb.

The underlined in the example (b), To accept the irresistible, lacks both a subject and a verb. To accept is not a complete verb, it is an infinitive. There is also no subject.

Avoiding Sentence Fragments

- You can also have a group of words that have both subject and verb but will still be considered as a fragment because it does not express a complete thought. For example:
 - c) Because Christianity is the most popular religion in Ghana.
- Though the above example has both subject (Christianity) and verb (is), it does not tell us what happened as a result of Christianity being the most popular religion in Ghana. Therefore, it is a fragment because it doesn't express complete thought: it is a subordinate clause.

Correcting Fragments

As a first step towards correcting fragments, learn to identify the kinds of fragments there are. The following are examples of sentence fragments.

Dependent-word fragments

- These are clauses that begin with a subordinating conjunction. A clause that begins with a subordinating conjunction, like example (c) above, cannot stand on its own as a complete sentence. Here are a few more examples of subordinating conjunctions: after, although, as soon as, unless, while and many more. To revise a sentence introduced by any such conjunction, attach it to the sentence that comes after it or to the one that comes before it as exemplified below:
 - a) **Fragment:** After watching the football match. I went out with my friends to celebrate.
 - b) **Revised:** After watching the football match, I went out with my friends to celebrate. (The fragment has been added to the sentence after it by the use of a comma)
- You can also correct such fragments by rewriting the sentence, for example:
I watched the football match and then went out with my friends to celebrate.

Correcting fragments

The -ing and to fragments

- When an –ing or to word appears at the beginning or near the beginning of a group of words, a fragment is likely to result. Look at the following fragments in italics:
 - a) *George searched the entire neighbourhood yesterday.* Trying to find his dog.
 - b) *When I was invited to dinner by my Korean friend,* I used chopsticks.
 - c) *To impress my friend.* I ended up not eating anything at all.
 - d) *We sat down to watch the match.* Not expecting anything special. To our surprise, we cheered, clapped, and jumped around throughout the match.

Correcting fragments

- Such fragments often lack subject and part of the verb. In (d) above, the writer assumes that the subject George in the first sentence will also serve as the subject for Trying to find his dog Jackson.
- Correct such fragments by
 - ✓ attaching the fragment to the sentence that comes before it or after it, which ever makes sense;
 - ✓ add a subject and change the verb to the correct form. The fragments above can be corrected as follows:
- d) George searched the entire neighbourhood yesterday trying to find his dog.
- e) When I was invited to dinner by my Korean friend, I used chopsticks to impress my friend.
- f) We sat down to watch the match. We didn't expect anything special.

Correcting fragments

Missing-subject fragments

- When a fragment lacks a subject, attach it to a neighbouring sentence if the two sentences are about the same person, place, or thing. You can also add a subject which can be in a form of a pronoun in the preceding sentence. For example:
- **Fragment:** Akosua speaks Akan fluently. And reads English very well. Kojo likes getting birthday presents. But hates writing thank you notes.
- **Revised:** Akosua speaks Akan fluently and reads English very well.
OR
Akosua speaks Akan fluently. She also reads English very well.

Kojo likes getting birthday presents **but** hates writing thank you notes.

OR

Kojo likes getting birthday presents. He however hates writing thank you notes.

Correcting fragments

Added-detail fragments

- Some added-detail fragments lack a subject and a verb. They often begin with relative pronouns such as: who, whom, whose, and that. Others often begin with one of the following words: also, especially, except, for example, like, including, such as, etc.
- Correct a fragment that begins with a relative pronoun by adding it to another sentence, or rewrite it as a complete sentence, as follows:
 - ✓ Fragment: My African Literature Lecturer assigned a novel by Chinua Achebe. Whose work I admire so much.
 - ✓ Revised: My African Literature Lecturer assigned a novel by Chinua Achebe whose work I admire so much.
- You can correct fragments introduced by words like also, especially, except, etc by adding a subject and a verb, or by inserting the fragment within the preceding sentence as in the following examples:
 - ✓ Fragment: John is taking a part-time course in Accounting. Also one in Marketing.
 - ✓ Revised: John is taking a part-time course in Accounting. Also, he is taking one in Marketing.
 - ✓ Fragment: My neighbour keeps several pets in his house. Including cats, dogs, and a parrot.
 - ✓ Revised: My neighbour keeps several pets, including, cats and a parrot, in his house.

Activity

Correct the fragments in the following group of sentences.

1. Nobody needs to tell you. That a person's mail is private.
2. Now you can also get electronic junk mail or 'spam'. Millions of advertisements sent over the internet at the push of a button.
3. To put it another way. Four trees per person per year can help our re-forestation programme.
4. If your internet service provider charges by the hour or the minute. You will be paying to read unwanted mail.

Avoiding Run-on Sentences

- A run-on sentence occurs when two or more independent clauses (sentences) are written together without a punctuation mark or a coordinating conjunction. These types of sentences are also known as fused sentences.
 - a) Gerald asked everyone in the room to keep quiet his favourite show was on.
- The other type of run-on sentences are those that are joined together by a comma instead of a period. These are known as comma splices:
 - b) An alcoholic is dependent on alcohol, my cousin suffered this addiction for years.
- In example (a) above, two independent clauses are written together as if they are only one thought. In example (b), a comma is used to connect the two complete thoughts. However, a comma alone is not enough to connect the two complete thoughts. A stronger connection is needed.

Avoiding Run-on Sentences

There are four common methods of correcting run-on

- Create two separate sentences by making sure that each independent clause has the appropriate punctuation; a period, a question mark, or an exclamation mark. You must also begin the second sentence with a capital letter. For example:

Run-on Sentence: Gerald asked everyone in the room to keep quiet his favourite show was on.

Revised: Gerald asked everyone in the room to keep quiet. His favourite show was on.

- Join two independent clauses by using both a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, or, nor, but, for, so, or yet). The coordinating conjunction indicates how the two clauses are related. For example:

Run-on Sentence: Closed-minded people often refuse to recognize opposing views they reject ideas without evaluating them.

Revised: Closed-minded people often refuse to recognize opposing views, and they reject ideas without evaluating them.

Avoiding Run-on Sentences

- When the independent clauses are closely connected in meaning, you can join them by a colon. For example:

Run-on Sentence: Studies have shown that male and female managers have different leadership styles as a result, workers may respond differently to each of them.

Revised: Studies have shown that male and female managers have different leadership styles: as a result, workers may respond differently to each of them.

- You can correct a run-on sentence by making one clause dependent. A dependent clause contains a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought. Look at the following examples:

Run-on Sentence: Facial expressions are very revealing they are an important communication tool.

Revised: Because facial expressions are very revealing, they are an important communication tool.

Activity

Correct the run-on or comma splices in the following sentences.

1. Shopping through Internet Bookstores is convenient, some people miss the atmosphere of traditional bookstore.
2. Openness is one way to build trust in a relationship another is to demonstrate tolerance and patience.
3. Today I didn't make good time driving to work every traffic light along the way was red.