



The final step in the writing process involves proofreading and re-reading your work to ensure that it represents the best work you are capable of. This handout provides tips for elevating a completed draft to a final draft. For any one of the suggestions below, it may be especially helpful to trade papers with someone else who may experience your paper differently than you do.

Highlighting 1: Organization

Get several different colors of highlighter. Color-code your paper by highlighting each key phrase in the “preview” portion of your introduction. Each color should represent a sub-point that supports your paper’s thesis. Read each sentence in your body paragraphs and conclusion and decide which sub-point it fits with. Highlight each sentence according to your original color code. Paragraphs should be predominately a single color, and colors should appear in the same order in which they appear in the introduction.

Cutting it up

Save a second copy of your paper so that you retain your most recent draft. Format the new copy so that it is a list of sentences. Print it. Cut each sentence into its own strip. Mix up the strips. Read the sentence on each strip and arrange them in the best order you can. Compare this order to your most recent draft. Rearrange the paper as you see fit. You can also cut out whole paragraphs and rearrange them in a more logical order.

Reverse outline

Create an outline to trace the progression of your paper. Account for each sentence in your paper and consider how it fits into the outline. If you have difficulty deciding how a sentence fits into the reverse outline, consider moving, deleting, or rewording it.

Highlighting 2: Quoted material

Highlight all quoted material. Use this visual indication of proportions to decide if you have quoted too little or too much, according to the expectations of your instructor and discipline. This highlighted copy of your paper may also be helpful as you read for language concerns such as verb tense and personal pronoun use; quoted portions of your paper should adhere to the same linguistic specifications as your original writing (e.g. no first person).

Setting It Aside

Complete your paper several days before it is due. Forget about it for two days. With at least a full day until the due date, re-read the paper. This distance in time between composing and reading a paper can help you encounter your own writing more like a reader will.

Learning from the Past

Review the comments you have received on previous essays. Make a list of the recurring and/or most substantial issues you have had in the past and read your current paper specifically for these issues.

Reading Backwards

Read each sentence, beginning with the final one. This should facilitate a slower reading pace, which should help you identify errors.

Reading Aloud

Read the paper aloud. You'll see. Many students will read what they want to see in their head, but it is much more difficult to read over errors when you are saying and listening to each word as you read your paper aloud.

Performing It

Record a video or audio file of yourself reading the paper, then listen to it. Reading aloud is a tried and true method of detecting flaws in language; listening to yourself read aloud may further help you notice imperfections in the sequence of ideas or even wording.

Coming to the Academic Success Center

Tutors at the Sam Houston Academic Success Center are prepared and happy to sit down with you at any stage of the writing process, revision included. They are available to listen as you read your paper aloud. They see many papers and may provide feedback on matters you are concerned with or even matters you have not considered.

Reviewing the Academic Success Center Handouts

The Sam Houston Academic Success Center provides handouts for many of the issues you might encounter as you try to perfect your paper, including handouts addressing parts of essays, grammar, and citations. Stop in and schedule an appointment at Farrington 111 or access our website at <http://www.shsu.edu/asc/>. Good luck!