

Some Techniques for Revising and Editing

These ideas will help you revise your own writing and edit others' writing.

The Paramedic Method for Revising Prose (Lanham 2006):^a

1. Circle the prepositions. [Look especially for strings of prepositional phrases.]
2. Circle the "is" forms [that is, forms of the verb "to be"]. [Strings of prepositions and use of the verb "to be" often occur together when a writer has used the passive voice.]
3. Ask, "Who is kicking whom?" [That is, who's the actor?]
4. Put this "kicking" action in a simple (not compound) active verb.
5. In general, spot verbs masquerading as nouns, and turn them into verbs.
6. Start each sentence fast--no mindless introductions [e.g., It may be said that...].
7. Whenever possible, avoid starting sentences with "There..."
8. Delete unnecessary words.

[To improve rhythm and sound]:

9. Write out sentences on a blank sheet of paper and mark off their basic rhythmic units with a /.
10. Mark off sentences within paragraphs, and count the number of words in each sentence.
11. Read the passage aloud with emphasis and feelings.
[Principle: Vary the lengths of sentences within paragraphs.]

Two Tips from Joseph M. Williams:^b

12. Every paragraph should have a topic sentence. Usually it's the first sentence.
13. The thought at the beginning of a sentence should follow from the thought of the previous sentence. As Williams (1990:64) puts it,

Generally, use the beginning of your sentence to refer to what you have already mentioned or knowledge that you can assume you and your reader readily share. Compare these:

The huge number of wounded and dead in **the Civil War** exceeded all the **other wars in American history**. One of the reasons for the lingering animosity between North and South today **is the memory of this terrible carnage**.

Of **all the wars in American history**, none has exceeded **the Civil War** in the huge number of wounded and dead. **The memory of this terrible carnage** is one of the reasons for the animosity between North and South today.

^aLanham, Richard A. 2006. *The Longman Guide to Revising Prose*. New York: Longman.

^bWilliams, Joseph M. (with two chapters co-authored by Gregory G. Colomb). 1990. *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.