* **Self-Assessment**
* **Introduction**
* Being critical as you assess your own work is an important part of improving your scientific writing. It can be hard to critically assess your own work, but if you learn how to do this effectively, you will greatly improve the quality of your final product. As you begin to assess the first draft of your writing, there are a few things you should look out for. Make sure you **read** your work **critically,** and try to look at it from an outsider’s perspective rather than your own. Allow enough time to go through you paper carefully, and make sure that everything you have written **says exactly what you mean it to**. To keep the content flowing and easy to read, **use smooth transition words and phrases,** but don’t forget to be concise.
* The process of self-assessment has two essential parts: **revision** and **editing.** The process of revision requires you to look at the whole paper and make more fundamental changes to the overall purpose and development of your paper (does your draft answer the question?). In contrast, editing requires you to consider each word, sentence and phrase in your work, and to look for grammatical or mechanical errors. At this stage you should be fine-tuning your paper.

**Self-Assessment Part One: Revision**

* Take a **break** between writing the first draft of your paper before you start to revise it, and make sure this break is at least 24 hours. It will help to tackle the revision process with a clear mind and a fresh perspective.

To assess the strengths (and weaknesses) of your paper as a whole, try to follow the steps below:

1) Focus only on the *meaning*and *structure* (don’t worry about editing at this stage)

* 2) If you did not create a writing **outline** before writing this first draft, create one nowfrom the draft that you have written to help you see the areas that are lacking in content or logical development
* 3) Make sure you read **aloud** from a **hard copy** (not from a computer screen), so that you can hear what you have written down. If possible, have someone else read your work back to you because this will help you interpret how others will understand your work.
* 4) Always **save** successive drafts for future comparison
* 5) Get other feedback from others when revising (relating to the content and logical development). Have a look at the ‘How to Give Effective Feedback’ part of our site for more tips here.
* You might find it helpful to use the following *checklist* (Table 1) as you revise your work. Doing so should help you decide whether your writing is saying what you mean it to say and taking the reader in the direction you desire.

**Table 1: Checklist for the Revision Process**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * **Checklist Questions** | * **Questions to Ask Yourself** | * **‘Yes’ or ‘No’** |
| * **Purpose** - **What is the purpose?** | Is my writing consistent?   * Does it follow the purpose of the assignment? |  |
| * **Thesis – What is my thesis?** | Does my paper follow the thesis and commit to it? |  |
| * **Audience – Who is in my audience?** | * Does this paper address the appropriate audience? * Do I have the proper background information? |  |
| * **Structure – What are the main points?** | * Do I use my main points to support my thesis? |  |
| * **Development – Which examples do I use?** | * Do my examples support my main points? |  |
| * **Tone – What is the tone of my paper?** | * Is my tone appropriate for my audience? * Which words or phrases create the tone? |  |
| * **Unity – How do all the sentences fit together?** | * Does each sentence contribute to the thesis and purpose of my paper? * Should anything be taken out or rewritten? |  |
| * **Coherence – Does each point link with others?** | * Does my paper flow? * Does it include transitions or phrases to keep it smooth and easy to read? * Can I improve the flow by changing or eliminating certain words or sentences? |  |
| * **Title, Introduction, Conclusion – How interesting are these?** | * Is my title interesting and accurate? * Do I engage and provoke interest to my audience with my opening? * Do I take a cohesive position with my conclusion? |  |

* **Self-Assessment Part Two: Editing**
* Take another **break** between writing the **revised** draft of your paper before you start to edit it, and make sure this break is at least 24 hours. It will help to tackle the revision process with a clear mind and a fresh perspective.
* To assess the strengths (and weaknesses) of the grammar and mechanics of your writing, try to follow the steps below:
* 1) Focus only on **word choice, punctuation**, and **grammar (**don’t change content at this stage**)**
* 2) Make sure you read **aloud** from a **hard copy** (not from a computer screen) when you edit your work so that you can hear what you have written down. If possible, have someone else read your work back to you because this will help you interpret how others will understand your work
* 3) Keep a simple **record of the mechanical mistakes** you tend to make
* 4) Use **“find”** in your word processor to search for overly used words and phrases. You can do this by clicking on the **“find”** button or pressing **“Ctrl+F”.** Then you can put in a word or phrase you have used and it will tell you how many times it appears in the document.
* 5) First, edit for **clarity,** and then edit for **grammatical** **correctness**
* You might find it helpful to use the following *checklist* (Table 2) as you edit your work. Doing so should help you decide whether your writing is saying what you mean it to say. For specific tips on getting your grammar correct, visit our dedicated pages here: we have information on the Active Vs. Passive Voice, Clarity and Simple Language, Mechanics and Punctuation, and Numbers and Units.

**Table 2: Checklist for the Editing Process**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * **Checklist Questions** | **Questions to Ask Yourself** | **‘Yes’ or ‘No’** |
| **Clarity – How easy is it to interpret my writing?** | * Do my words and sentences convey what I intend them to?   Is anything confusing? |  |
| **Effectiveness – How engaging is my language?** | * Do I engage my audience? * Do I express my ideas clearly for the given audience and purpose of the assignment?   Do I emphasize my main points and use appropriate words and sentences as support? |  |
| **Correctness – How accurate is my grammar?** | * Is all my grammar correct? * Do any errors reduce the clarity or effectiveness of the paper?   Did I check my spelling, verb agreement, and punctuation? |  |

**Additional Tips for Editing**

* If you are having trouble editing your work or are not sure where to start, follow the list below. There are some handy tactics to make the editing process seem less daunting and more bearable.
* **A)** Try reading your paper in **reverse** (sentence by sentence), to make sure each sentence makes sense on its own
* **B) Cut,** **Don’t Add!**  Every point, statement, question, or word should have a reason to be there
* **C) Eliminate redundancies** within sentences, and within your paper

**D) Avoid** the **passive voice**; it makes your sentences more long-winded than they should be

* **E)** Use spell-check and grammar-check in your software, but **not** at the expense of doing this manually (these tools will spot things you miss, but you might spot things they miss too)
* Finally, after you have edited your work, make sure you **proofread** and **format** the final copy. It is during this time that you should slowly re-read and compare your first draft to the final copy. Now, you can check your list of references used in the paper to make sure the information from them and your formatting is correct.