

Good Writers Weren't Born That Way

ASK ANY GOOD WRITER AND SHE'LL TELL YOU THAT THE SECRET ISN'T INSPIRATION, IT'S DISCIPLINE. GOOD WRITERS ARE GOOD BECAUSE THEY TAKE THE TIME TO EDIT. LC SHOWS YOU THE TRICKS OF THE TRADE.

By Sarah Montante

Almost all good writing begins with bad writing—even that of published authors and Pulitzer Prize winners. Ernest Hemingway, one of the most prominent writers of the 20th century, rewrote the last page of his novel *A Farewell to Arms* 39 times before he was satisfied. Our motto: Write once, edit twice. The best writers know that a first draft is just raw material. It can only become great through revision.

> WRITE ONCE, EDIT TWICE

This month, we'll teach you how to do a first edit to revise the overall structure, logic, and content of your paper. Next month, we'll help you polish your prose to perfection.

> THE FIRST EDIT

Even if you've written your essay from an outline, you are likely to have strayed from your master plan. This is natural. As you write, new ideas and insights come to you that you couldn't have foreseen. Making all this flow is one of the main goals of your first edit.

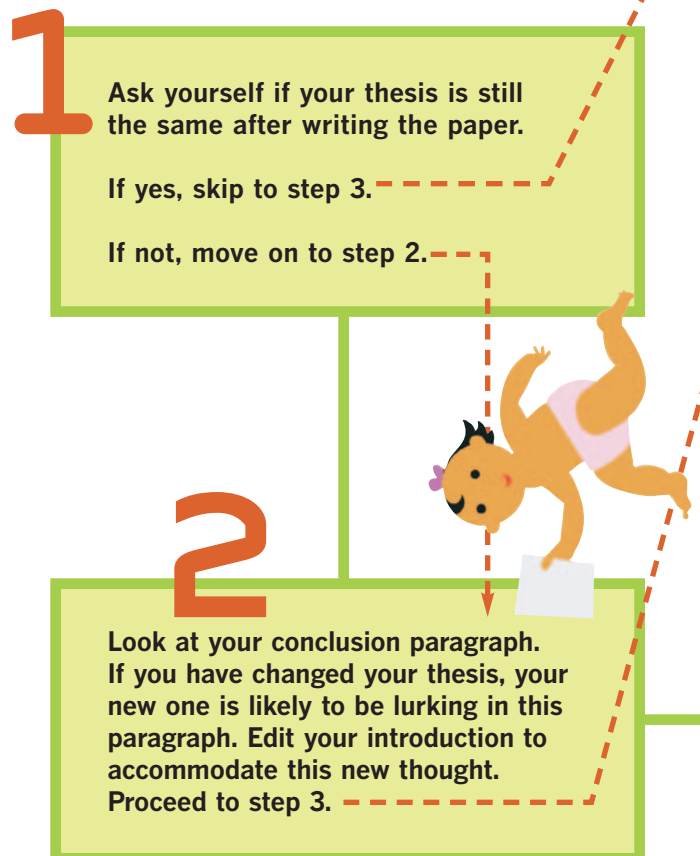
> ORDER, PURE AND SIMPLE

The first edit of any paper is meant to reveal the ways in which your argument has evolved through your writing and to allow you to adjust the structure of your paper accordingly. Following these steps is not hard, but it might require you to rewrite whole sections of your paper or go back to your research. Don't skimp on this phase; this is where the real work of writing happens, and where your most interesting insights will unfold.

Once you've finished this round, you'll have a solid second draft, and the hard part will be over.



Your outline can be a useful reference point as you revise your paper. Once you have finished your first draft, set it aside so that your brain has time to recharge. Then, reread your outline and follow these steps.





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Reread the topic sentences of all your supporting paragraphs. Do they support your thesis? Does each successive topic sentence build on the previous one to form a logical argument? If you have doubts, try the following three steps:

- a. Make sure that your paragraphs are in order. Write your topic sentences on a separate sheet of paper and make sure that they are in a logical sequence.
- b. Make sure that there are no gaps in your sequence of topic sentences.
- c. Make sure that your topic sentences actually support your thesis.

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Now that you have assured yourself that your topic sentences (and therefore, paragraphs) are in order, look at the paragraphs themselves. Just as the topic sentences must support the thesis, so must every sentence in a paragraph support the topic. To make sure, ask yourself the following questions:



- a. Does each paragraph offer two to three concrete examples to support the topic sentence? If not, go back to your research notes and put in more information.
- b. Do any of the sentences repeat information included elsewhere in the paragraph or the paper? If so, delete them.
- c. Are there any sentences that don't belong? Sometimes a thought will come to you in a flash, and you have to write it down or else you'll lose it. If any of these stray insights are stranded in your body paragraphs, now is the time to take them out.

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Once all of your body paragraphs are in order, reread your conclusion. This paragraph should tie together all of the points made by each of your topic sentences to support your thesis. While you should not introduce any new information in the conclusion, it's OK to introduce a new thought that takes your argument to the next step.



Next month: We'll introduce you to the pleasure of fine-tuning your final paper.