

Final Draft: Revise and Resubmit

## Background

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Three central learning objectives of this course are heightened competency in communication, readiness to engage philosophically loaded and ethical debates, and proficiency in writing argumentative essays. The ability to respond to constructive criticism and critically examine one's own work is instrumental to achieving each of these objectives. It puts one in a position to clarify, sharpen, and bolster his or her ideas and arguments through written communication. That is one of the main reasons why there is a revising component to the final paper assignment.

Another reason is that revising is a central aspect of academia. In graduate school, it is an integral part of preparing papers for seminar assignments and (more importantly) conferences and peer-reviewed journals. Many peer-reviewed journals, moreover, will accept a paper for publication only on the condition that the author(s) respond(s) to referee feedback. That means (a) revising in light of that feedback and (b) explaining in a cover letter how that feedback is addressed in the revised draft. You will do something similar for this course.

## Instructions

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PART 1: Revise your paper.

I recommend that you start by printing out your paper and critically re-reading it. When re-reading your paper, you should ask yourself questions like the following:

- How could you make your thesis statement even clearer? Could your paper benefit by indicating in your introduction how its structure will unfold? Would your paper be easier to follow with a different structure? For example, does it help readability to discuss elements that appear later in your paper sooner rather than later? Does your concluding paragraph offer closure to your paper and tie up every loose end?
- Should you consider adding signposts at various stages of your paper? For example, within a given section of your paper, should it be completely obvious to your reader what you have accomplished so far and where you are going with it? If not, you should consider making it explicit so that you won't risk losing your reader.
- Are you using any technical terminology that might be unclear to your reader? If you've provided definitions of crucial concepts, how can you improve those definitions? Could providing examples help to further illuminate those concepts? Do your examples show what you take them to show? Could you pick better examples instead?
- Have you adequately summarized the issue or position discussed in your paper? For example, will it be clear to a reader who is completely unfamiliar with it?
- How might someone object to you at various stages of your paper? How would you rank those objections in order of seriousness? Do you have the space to discuss any of those objections? If so, should you discuss them throughout or postpone them until the end?
- Have you sufficiently developed your arguments so that they will be completely transparent to a reader who has not discussed them with you before? Does your paper have a voice, i.e., does it make a unique contribution (however modest) to the topic? If not, what can you do to ensure that it does?
- Are there any issues with the grammar, spelling, or style? Are you using commas, semicolons, colons, em dashes, transition phrases, and so on correctly? Have you made the best word choices? Do any of your sentences sound awkward or cumbersome when read out loud? Are any of your paragraphs too long? How can you improve the flow of your paper?

With these questions in mind, make notes as you read through your paper and save them for later.

Next, carefully look through the comments you received on your paper. **If you didn't receive many comments on your rough draft, you should schedule to meet with your TA to request additional feedback.** Once those avenues have been exhausted, you can also schedule a meeting with me for additional feedback.

Finally, take all of that feedback (including your own) into account and revise your paper. If your rough draft was already very polished, you may not have much work to do. Perhaps you simply need to re-write a few sentences and/or add some additional material. By contrast, if your rough draft was extremely rough, you may have your work cut out for you. It's possible that you may need to completely re-write entire paragraphs or sections or even the whole paper. No matter what, however, you should expect to do some work, because the goal is to improve your work, and there is always room for improvement.

PART 2: Write a 1–2 page cover letter cataloging the major revisions that went into your final draft.

You should definitely discuss the substantive feedback you received from your grader, but this is also an opportunity to work through your own concerns for the paper. By “substantive feedback,” I mean feedback that pertains to your ideas and arguments as opposed to your spelling, grammar, or style. While you don't need to discuss all of the feedback you have received, you should indicate the major revisions you have made to your rough draft. Ultimately, this part of the assignment is intended to help you reflect on the revision process as you work through it.

For each criticism or suggestion, you should address each of the following:

- What is the criticism or suggestion?
- Why, in your own words, is it important to address that criticism or suggestion?
- How have you revised your paper to address that criticism or suggestion?

For example, your cover letter might contain elements along the following lines:

(a) My grader had trouble understanding my thesis. That is a major problem, because if the reader doesn't understand what I'm trying to do throughout my paper, then he or she won't be in a position to evaluate whether I have succeeded in supporting my thesis. In order to address this concern, I have completely re-written my thesis statement. Previously, it was lacking in detail, and some of my word choices were ambiguous. My new thesis statement [is improved in such and such ways]...

(b) My grader had trouble following the second paragraph on p. 4. This paragraph was meant to play a central role in establishing my thesis, so it is extremely important that my reader understands it; otherwise, it may seem that I have not sufficiently argued my case. To address this worry, I re-wrote the paragraph so that it is much clearer [in such and such ways]. I also added another paragraph elaborating on [such and such aspects of the previous paragraph].

(c) When re-reading my paper, I started to worry that I hadn't provided a proper characterization of [the philosophical position]. That is a problem, because I'm trying to argue against [that position], rather than a caricature of it. To address this, I re-wrote my statement of [the position] so that it is clear that [the position] is committed to [such and such].

Etc.

PART 3: Upload your revised draft and cover letter as PDFs to the final paper assignment on Canvas.

Be sure to re-read "Paper Rubric" so that you understand how your final draft should be formatted and how it will be graded. **Also, if it wasn't made explicit, you should ask your grader which grade you could expect to receive on the final paper assignment if you were to submit your rough draft completely unchanged.** That should give you some indication of how much work you need to do to get an A on the final paper.

**Congratulations!** You should be more or less done with this course. You should also be better prepared to write argumentative essays in the future.