

Tutor Toolbox Excerpt

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My area of interest is revising and editing research papers. Often, learners who come in are overwhelmed with books and facts, unable to keep their thoughts straight long enough to write a draft. Those who have managed to produce a draft, commonly fill it in with lists of facts, or have left out the data needed to prove their statement altogether. The handbook I found useful was *The Scott Foresman Handbook for Writers*, 3rd ed., by Maxine Hairston and John J. Ruszkiewicz (p. 630-634). There are seven points made that I feel are important for revising research paper for yourself or for your learners.

1. Establish a relationship between the sources- this makes the information you have gathered into your own ideas. The research paper should not sound like a collaboration of book reports.
2. Address all counter arguments- this only strengthens your argument by showing the reader your knowledge of the subject matter and your confidence in our knowledge. Ignorance is the only explanation given to your reader for an unaddressed counter-argument, causing your audience to lose faith in you as an authority.
3. Keep the topic interesting- most research papers are based on studies. We all know that statistics and dry data are boring to read. To get, and keep, your reader's attention, put information in that is surprising or contradicts common knowledge.
4. Finish the essay in half the allotted time- leaving time to strengthen the argument and fill gaps in the data. Research is always the hardest when looking for a specific statistic or to fit the point being made. It is also difficult when you have exhausted all local resources. Remember, inter-library loans are not always the most efficient way to obtain sources. You may find that in the time left, you can add an interview of a local "expert" in the field.
5. Read critically- this is especially important as a tutor. You do not want to come in with any preconceptions or background information that may alter the learner's paper. For example, I had a learner who did a research paper on diabetes. I have a major in biology with a minor in nutrition, so I have learned this material quite extensively. I had to ask her to clarify whether diabetes was a curable or not, after she had stated that it was not curable and later said that you could be "diabetes-free."
6. Tell where there is too much and too little information- too much information can be tied into keeping it interesting for a reader, as well as establishing a relationship between sources in that you want to formulate ideas, not list raw statistics. However, too little information is more damaging. Not enough information can lead your audience to believe that you either do not know your subject matter, you cannot prove the point you wanted to make, so rebuttals are not made in defense of your position, or that you have not put forth the effort to work efficiently on this assignment.
7. Test the conclusion against the introduction- you may start your argument saying something like "the gray wolf should be removed from the federal endangered species act for the state of Wisconsin." Once you finish your paper, you may have found a tangent on that subject that was more appealing. Your paper is organized now, in such a manner, that your conclusion says, "The gray wolf is not a major predator of the whitetail deer in Wisconsin." By comparing the introduction to the conclusion you can start to analyze the flow of the paper and its pertinence to the topic you originally chose.

There are several ways to test the organization of a research paper. The first method involves underlining the main idea of each paragraph. Then read through the underlined sentences and see if they flow, and convey the

meaning that you are trying to get across. If they do not flow, try rearranging the paragraphs, or change the main idea of the paragraph(s) that stand out. The other way is to write the main points down on note cards and arrange them to develop the best organization; this works especially well when working with long reports, containing much data.

A few other points related to order are: all pages should be numbered including the title page. From the title page, there should be an outline, if required, and should be on its own page. The next page should be the abstract, again on a separate page. Then the body of the essay, and finally the work cited page. The inclusion of the outline and abstract, and the format of the title and work cited page vary between disciplines. When in doubt, check with the professor on the preferences. It is better to ask, and impress the teacher with your attention to detail than to get it wrong, and lose points.