Mastering Literary Analysis – Week 8

Revision & Proofreading

Once you have written your first draft, your next steps are **revision** and **proofreading**.

First, Revision - 1) Revision is first of all focused on *ideas* and *order*. You want fresh eyes for this step. If possible, take a break from your paper for a day or three. In the initial revision, you will want to check your claims and essay structure; you focus on the "big things." You are going back to the beginning to make sure your argument is the strongest it can be. 2) After this, revision should then focus on clarity and elegance of expression and sentences.

Next, Proofreading - Proofreading is the final stage before you submit your paper. When you proofread, you are not focusing on the ideas but rather correct formatting, grammar, syntax, and punctuation.

How to revise an essay:

Step one: Print out your essay and read through it aloud with a pencil in hand. You are focusing on *ideas and order*. Questions to ask yourself as you read:

> Claims (thesis and sub-theses): Do my claims get to the heart of what you are trying to argue? Are they really claims? Do they clearly connect to one another and build upon one another?
>
> Evidence: Do these quotes clearly and directly support my sub-theses? Do I introduce my quotes with context and an intro phrase? Are my quotes too long/too short? Do I have enough evidence to prove my points?
>
> Analysis: Is my analysis merely summary? Do I analyze every single quote? Is analysis the longest part of every paragraph? Is this analysis compelling to someone who disagrees with me (you should also ask this about evidence/quotes)?

Step two: Now you will re-outline your paper. Students sometimes get in an overly-rigid frame of mind about writing and think that outlining is something that only happens at the beginning. Outlining is process for making sure your structure is tight, and it is relevant in all stages. Make a new outline of your paper based on the things you noticed in step one: Make your claims clearer, make sure they directly relate to one another, plan for more/less/better evidence, etc. Plan your "links" or transitions between paragraphs.

Step three: Pull out a NEW, BLANK DOCUMENT on your computer (or pull out a fresh sheet of paper if you really love writing by hand). This can be the hardest step; students usually want to "fix" their first drafts by reorganizing and rephrasing things directly in that document. *Do not do this*. You will end up with an ungainly Frankenstein's monster. And I can almost guarantee that it will take you longer than just re-typing it. Here's the process:

1) Create that new document and label it "Pride and Prejudice Essay, Draft 2" or something appropriate.

2) Using *mostly* your new outline, but also referring to positive things in your first draft, type out a second draft of your paper.

Rinse and repeat steps one through three as many times as necessary to get your paper as close to that one, central, key idea that you are trying to get at. The author of this handout has written as many as six drafts of a paper before she felt that it was "right." You may not have time for this, but never be afraid of starting over and making your paper fundamentally better from the ground up. That being said, if you are the kind of person who makes perfection the enemy of the good, be content to get as close as possible and do not worry too much about phrasing and style. Many students spend so much time making individual sentences "right" as they write and revise that they never really get off the ground.

Step four: Once you have a draft which is as close as you can get in the "big things" (ideas, evidence, analysis), print out your paper again and once again read it aloud with a pencil in hand. This time, you are looking for beauty and clarity—for style. It can really help to read it aloud to someone else. When you read something to someone else, you are able to hear it with new ears. If you have *lots* of things you need to change, I suggest once again re-typing your paper. Again, stitching together a new draft from an old one can actually cause *more* errors than you started with (believe me, I know from experience). If you do not have too many changes, you can go ahead and just make those changes rather than retyping the whole paper.

Proofreading:

You are almost finished! It can be helpful to have 24 hours of distance before proofreading/editing, if possible. Once again, print out your draft and read through it, looking for the following:

- Grammar, syntax, punctuation. Look particularly for run-on sentences and comma splices:
    - run-on sentence: two independent clauses joined by a conjunction but not a comma
        - Example: My fuzzy cat is curled up next to me and he is sleeping.
        - Correction: My fuzzy cat is curled up next to me, and he is sleeping.
    - comma splice: two independent clauses joined by a comma but not a conjunction
        - Wrong: My cat is trying to sit on my keyboard, I will not allow him.
        - Correction: My cat is trying to sit on my keyboard, and I will not allow him.
    - Take-away: independent clauses must be joined by BOTH a comma and a conjunction.
- Correct contractions (can't → cannot; wouldn't → would not; etc.), remove any instances of the first and second person if necessary, do not begin any sentences with conjunctions ("and" and "but" are the biggest offenders).
- Check your formatting: Is it according to proper MLA style?

- Quotes: are your quotes formatted correctly? Do you have a space between the quotation mark and the parenthetical? Example: ". . . the dog ran howling to the porch" (Smith 21).
- Make sure your "works cited" page is correctly formatted (if necessary)
- Do you have a title? Is it both interesting and clear?

That is it! You are finished and ready to hand in your paper!

Quick reminder: Three ways to introduce quotes:

1) **Use a comma.** This method is generally used when the speaker of the quotation is identified. In such cases, the comma usually follows a verb indicating speech or dialogue. (Ex. says, ". . .", states, ". . .", asks, " . . .")

> Example: Speaking to Keller, Annie explains, "words can be her eyes, to everything in the world outside her, and inside too" (Gibson 92).

2) **Integrate the quotation "seamlessly."** This method requires that the quotation fit into the sentence naturally, almost as if the introduction and the quotation itself were spoken by the same voice. Often a seamless integration follows the subordinating conjunction "that."

> Example: Speaking about the importance of language to Helen, Annie explains that "words can be her eyes, to everything in the world outside her, and inside too" (Gibson 92).

3) **Use a colon (but only after an independent clause).** A colon tells the reader that what follows is closely related to the preceding clause. Thus, you should indicate or summarize at least part of the content that follows a colon.

> Example: Speaking to Keller, Annie emphasizes the importance of language to Helen: "words can be her eyes, to everything in the world outside her, and inside too" (Gibson 92).