

Revision

The word *revise* is composed of two parts:

-re- = again

-vis- = see

The literal definition of *revise*, then, is *to see again*. When you revise something, it means you are seeing it again, maybe in a new light or with new information, and making significant improvements. Teachers often encourage students to revise their writing, but students seldom actually “see it again” before deciding what improvements to make. Because of this, they aren’t actually revising their work.

What students usually do is *edit*. Editing is done at a sentence level, correcting spelling, punctuation, or word choice. Editing is about fixing small mistakes, and it should be the last thing students do before they submit a final draft. Some people even call editing “final polishing.”

Revision, on the other hand, deals with the writing as a whole, the overall strengths and weaknesses of the content, the validity of the argument, the focus and organization, the supporting examples and details, and the voice. In other words, revisions are big changes that occur between the first and final drafts. The purpose of revision is to ask questions, further develop ideas, challenge arguments, and address those challenges. The purpose of revision is to expand and clarify ideas rather than “correct” them. This may involve moving or removing entire paragraphs, narrowing ideas, completely rewriting vague text, and significantly expanding existing paragraphs with new supporting evidence. (*See samples.*)

Here’s a metaphor to describe the difference between revision and editing: Revision is like tearing down your modest little home to rebuild it as a spectacular mansion. This type of construction involves a major overhaul of your existing home. You may use some of the same materials from your original house, but many new building supplies will be needed. Editing, on the other hand, is not about new construction or even remodeling. Editing is like fixing a leaky faucet, replacing a lock, or cleaning the carpet. Clearly, revision is a much more significant job that has a much greater impact on the final product. Since modern word processors often take care of some editing tasks, this course will focus more heavily on revising.



Credited by Sarah Millwright

Here's an example to illustrate the difference between editing and revision:

Essay Assignment: *Animal Farm: Whose side are you on?*

Utah Write Score: 12

If I had to side with any of the animals I would defiantly side with 'Ole Major. I would side with him because if I was in his and the other animals situation, with having an owner that almost never feed you and slaughtered all of your friends, I would want to get out of that as quick as I could. About the rebellion, of course I would join it to stop the starving, slaughter, whipping, poor working conditions, and long working hours. That is no way to live. There is no reason not to join the rebellion and attend the secret meetings either. It's not like the humans can understand you and torture you for being part of the rebellion. The humans can't even understand what you are saying because they don't speak animal language. So in short I wouldn't have even considered not joining 'Ole Major and the rebellion to end the rain of the humans.

Edited Version (Can you spot the changes?)

Utah Write Score: 13

If I had to side with any of the animals, I would definitely side with Old Major. I would side with him because if I was in the same situation, with an owner that almost never fed me and slaughtered all of my friends, I would want to get out of that as quickly as I could. Regarding the rebellion, of course I would join it to stop the starving, slaughter, whipping, poor working conditions, and long working hours. That is no way to live. There is no reason not to join the rebellion and attend the secret meetings, either. It's not like the humans can understand you and torture you for being part of the rebellion. The humans can't even understand what you are saying because they don't speak animal language. So, in short, I wouldn't have even considered not joining Old Major and the rebellion to end the reign of the humans.

Revised Version (See the difference?)

Utah Write Score: 24

In the novel *Animal Farm*, George Orwell uses animals to represent the different players in a political system that crushes and destroys some while others thrive at their expense. A sharp criticism of Communism, the novel takes place on a farm where an aged boar named Old Major calls for a revolution of the animals against their human oppressors. In a speech early in the story, Old Major spells out his case against the human who runs the farm: Mr. Jones. He is a drunk who frequently forgets to feed the animals. He treats them miserably, forces them to work in return for the smallest rations, and then uses the fruits of their labor to feed his family and buy liquor for himself. The animals are clearly the victims of a cruel leader, and in his speech, Old Major spells out the problem so that even the simplest animals can understand it. Because of his leadership and logical explanation, I would side with Old Major and join his revolution against the humans. Of course, there is a certain amount of risk involved. If Jones discovers the plot, he will likely slaughter those involved, but, as Old Major has already established, this is usually how things end up for the animals, anyway. The hens, for example, lay eggs which are taken away from them before they ever hatch, and when they are no longer capable of laying a certain quota of eggs, their heads are chopped off and they are served to Jones at dinner. This is one example of how the animals are used up in every possible way, and their lives are never their own. To any animal on the farm, revolution provides more hope than continued sad survival. Old Major makes this clear, and I would follow his example because he is a leader with my interests at heart, not just his own.

*Some of the information on this handout has been abbreviated from these websites:
Clarion University of Pennsylvania: <http://www.clarion.edu/67245.pdf>
University of California, Berkeley: <http://slc.berkeley.edu/writing/EditingvRevision.htm>*