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of ordering your points would help. *Never* decide that you can best solve the problem by hoping your readers will not notice. The satisfaction of finally solving the problem will build your confidence and sooner or later make your writing easier and better.

## REVIEWING YOUR WORK AND REVISING AGAIN

Precisely how you move from one draft to another is up to you and will depend on the ways you work best. However you do it, find all the things that bother you (and that *should* bother you) and then gradually correct them, moving toward a better paper with each succeeding draft. Here are some things to watch for:

*Thesis and central thrust:* Is your main point clear? Do you state it effectively and early? Do you make clear what the work is about? Are you fair to the spirit and emphasis of the work? Do you make clear the relationship between your thesis and the central thrust of the work? Do you explain *how* the work creates its effect rather than just asserting that it does?

*Organization:* Does your paper move logically from beginning to end? Does your first paragraph set up the main issue you are going to discuss and suggest the direction of your discussion? Do your paragraphs follow each other in a coherent and logical order? Does the first sentence of each paragraph accurately suggest what that paragraph will contain? Does your final paragraph draw a conclusion that follows from the body of your paper? Do you resolve the issues you say you resolve?

*Use of evidence:* Do you use enough examples? Too many? Does each example prove what you say it does? Do you explain each example fully enough? Are the examples sufficiently varied? Are any of them labored, or overexplained, or made to bear more weight than they can stand? Have you left out any examples useful to your thesis? Do you include any gratuitous ones just because you like them? Have you achieved a good balance between examples and generalizations?

*Tone:* How does your voice sound in the paper? Confident? Does it show off too much? Is it too timid or self-effacing? Do you ever sound smug? Too tentative? Too dogmatic? Would a neutral reader be put off by any of your assertions? By your way of arguing? By your choice of examples? By the language you use?

*Sentences:* Does each sentence read clearly and crisply? Have you rethought and rewritten any sentences you can't explain? Is the first sentence of your paper a strong, clear one likely to interest a neutral reader? Is the first sentence of each paragraph an especially vigorous one? Are your sentences varied enough? Do you avoid the passive voice and "there is/there are" sentences?

*Word choice:* Have you used any words whose meaning you are not sure of? In any cases in which you were not sure of what word to use, did you stay with the problem until you found the exact word? Do your metaphors and figures of speech make literal sense? Are all the idioms used correctly? Is your terminology correct? Do your key words always mean *exactly* the same things? Have you avoided repetition by varying your sentences rather than using several different terms to mean precisely the same thing?

*Conciseness:* Have you eliminated all the padding you put in when you didn't think your paper would be long enough? Have you gone through your paper, sentence by sentence, to eliminate all the unnecessary words and phrases? Have you looked for sentences (or even paragraphs) that essentially repeat what you have already said, then eliminated all repetition? Have you checked for multiple examples and pared down to the best and most vivid ones? Have you gotten rid of all inflated phrasing calculated to impress readers? Have you eliminated all roundabout phrases and rewritten long, com-

plicated, or confusing sentences into shorter, clearer ones? Are *you* convinced that you have trimmed every possible bit of excess and that you cannot say what you have to say any more economically?

*Punctuation and mechanics:* Have you checked the syntax in each *separate* sentence? Have you checked the spelling of any words you are not sure of or that look funny? Have you confirmed the punctuation of each sentence? Have you read every quotation word by word against the original? Have you given proper credit for all material—written or oral—that you have borrowed from others? Have you followed the directions your instructor gave you for citations, notes, and form?

As you begin to revise, look first at the larger issues (your thesis, organization, and supporting evidence) to make sure you find and solve any major problems early on. Then you will be in a better position to work on your tone, sentences, choice of words, and punctuation and mechanics. In the final stages, reread through your paper looking for one problem at a time—that is, go through it once looking at paragraphing, another time looking at individual sentences, still another for word choice or problems of grammar. You cannot really check too many things too often—although you can get so absorbed with little things that you overlook larger matters. With practice, you will learn to watch carefully for the kinds of mistakes you are most prone to; everyone has individual weaknesses and flaws. Here are some of the most common stumbling blocks for beginning writers:

1. Haste. (Don't start too late, or finish too soon after you begin.)
2. Pretentiousness. (Don't use words you don't understand, tackle problems that are too big for you, or write sentences you can't explain. Aim to make sense, not a big, empty impression.)
3. Boredom. (The quickest way to bore others is to be bored yourself. If you think your paper will be a drag, you are probably right. Rather than faking interest in something you can't get excited about, keep at it until you find a spark.)
4. Randomness. (Don't string together half a dozen unrelated ideas or insights and con yourself into thinking that you have written a paper.)
5. Imprecision. (Don't settle for approximation, either in words or ideas. Being 50 percent right means being 50 percent wrong.)
6. Universalism. (Don't try to be a philosopher and make grand statements about life. Stick to what is in the work you are writing about.)
7. Vagueness. (Don't settle for a general "sense" of the work you are talking about. Get it detailed, get it right.)
8. Wandering. (Don't lose track of your subject or the work you are talking about.)
9. Sloppiness. (Don't sabotage all your hard work on analysis and writing by failing to notice misspelled words, grammatical mistakes, misquotations, incorrect citations or references, or typographical errors. Little oversights make readers suspicious.)
10. Impatience. (Don't be too anxious to get done. Enjoy the experience; savor the process. Have fun watching yourself learn.)

Being flexible—being willing to rethink your ideas and reorder your argument as you go—is crucial to success in writing, especially in writing about literature. You will find different (and better) ways to express your ideas and feelings as you struggle with revisions, and you will also find that—in the course of analyzing the work, preparing to write, writing, and rewriting—your response to the work itself will grow and shift somewhat. For one thing, you will have become more knowledgeable as a result of the time and effort you have spent, and you will have a more subtle understanding of the work. For another, the work itself will have changed. Just as a work is a little different for every reader, it is also a little different with every successive reading by the *same* reader; and