

## Biology Writing Resources – Strategies for essay revision

### 1.) **Your Goal:** Overall clarity and coherence of your essay.

- Always read your essay aloud; or, better yet, have someone else read your essay aloud to you

How/Why this helps: hearing your work aloud may help you identify missing words, convoluted sentence structure. Hearing someone else read your work can also help you identify where a reader may stumble over phrases or allow you to hear where additional punctuation may help your syntax.

- “Reverse Outline” your essay by writing a one-sentence summary of each paragraph in your draft.

How/Why this helps: if you can’t identify the major or primary concept within an individual paragraph, you may need to consider revising that paragraph. Reverse outlining also helps you identify possible repetition within your writing; this may help you identify the overall order of your ideas or give you a sense of paragraphs or ideas that could be truncated or combined.

- Highlight or underline each of the transitions between paragraphs or ideas.

How/Why this can help: If you can’t specifically identify the ways in which you’re transitioning between paragraphs of ideas, it generally means those transitions do not exist; if you can’t identify the transition, your reader generally won’t be able to either. Bolstering your existing transitions can also help the overall flow and tone of your text.

- Write a 3-5 sentence annotation of your text and then compare that summary to the text itself.

How/Why this can help: If you can’t easily and succinctly paraphrase the major themes or ideas within your text, those themes may not be entirely clear. Writing an annotation also allows you the opportunity to compare and contrast your summary with the text itself; if there are great discrepancies between your annotation and the text itself, you may want to reconsider the tone and structure of your text.

- Compare and contrast the introduction and the conclusion of your text.

How/Why this can help: This strategy allows you to examine the primary components of your text that should offer an accurate overall sense of the topic, major ideas, themes, and importance of the material in your text. This technique also allows you to gain a greater sense of how your ideas relate to one another and gauge the overall tone of your writing.

### 2.) **Your Goal:** Overall clarity within individual paragraphs.

- Identify that major idea with a particular paragraph

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How/Why this can help: each paragraph should have a central idea, or possibly a pair of interwoven ideas. If an individual paragraph has too many individual themes, you may want to consider truncating the paragraph or making an individual concept its own paragraph. Noting major themes within an individual paragraph can also help identify inter-textual redundancies.

- Highlight instances of, and delineate between, summarizing, paraphrasing, and direct quotation.

How/Why this can help: As an author, you need to have specific knowledge of precisely how you're utilizing research material and integrating various perspectives. This technique not only helps you understand how you're relating specific pieces of information, but also affords the opportunity to understand where your research ends and where your own analysis begins. Doing this may also help identify particular pieces of information that may need additional citation.

- Determine where and how you are explaining or analyzing instances of paraphrasing or quoting.

How/Why this can help: your writing will most often require you to analyze, categorize, or interpret your research material; as such, ownership of ideas need to be clear and you need to be mindful of your reader. Part of your ethos and tone as a writer is directly determined by the ways in which you choose to expand upon background research or further contextualize your sources. You may also want to consider elaboration or analysis that needs to be extended for the benefit of your authorial purpose or for your reader.

### 3.) **Your Goal**: clear, concise, effective sentences.

- Identifying or highlighting subject-verb relationships and parallel structure.

How/Why this can help: this exercise will force you to specifically identify each subject and corresponding verb in each of your sentences; if you cannot identify the direct relationship between a particular subject and its corresponding verb, you need to consider revising the sentence. This strategy will also help you examine your overall sentence structure and can help improve sentence variance.

- Identifying introductory phrases and embedded dependent and independent clauses.

How/Why this can help: it's incredibly common to have a variety of additional phrases and clauses embedded within a typical subject-verb-direct object construction, and understanding the ways in which you're using phrases and clauses can help you craft clear, concise sentences. It may also help to note whether you make frequent use of introductory phrases or add dependent clauses at the ends of your sentences.

- Examining and diversifying sentence length and variance.

How/Why this can help: strings of short choppy sentences can be just as detrimental as an extended series of long, convoluted compound or compound-complex sentences. As a writer,

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it is important to ensure your writing is stylistically and syntactically diverse. It may help to look at overall sentence length, the number of clauses within individual sentences, and other patterns you notice within your writing. Remember, however, that clarity of meaning should always supersede stylistic concerns.

- Examining word choice and specificity

How/Why this can help: Very often, wording can be incredibly important to your writing. For example, prepositions that seem identical could have drastically different connotations. Likewise, verbs or adjectives that seem similar may denote extremely specific meanings. Each word you choose is a rhetorical choice you're making as an author and choosing the wrong word can be a great impediment to your overall readability and meaning.

### **Other Editing Strategies:**

- Read your sentences out of order to ensure you're concentrating on the construction and content of that sentence rather than becoming caught up in the content of the paragraph.
- Identify instances of plural, possessive, and contractions and check for typos in each.
- Check each sentence for correct homonym usage and other mistakes spell check will not correct.
- Edit in short increments; the longer you work on sentence-level editing in a single sitting, the less likely you are to spot errors.