

How to Revise Your Writing (©2000 WBF)

When you work in groups doing a combined speaking and writing activity

Remember: the goal is not just to correct the text as quickly and easily as possible, but also to use the spoken language while you are doing improving your writing.

1. Try reading your text (or your partner's) aloud, deliberately but not too slowly, and with expression. Your ears and mouth may help you correct some errors. Speaking the words will also slow you down and make you look more closely.
2. If you are reading someone else's writing, at each phrase and sentence consider whether you can really understand what the writer is attempting to convey.
3. If the current rating is 2 or below, the text probably needs expansion even before you correct it much. At the most you can look at it to find what will likely be many severe errors at the letter and word level, and serious distortions of language from earlier units. Later you can worry about larger chunks of language and material from more recent units.
4. If the current rating is 3 or above, there are probably some word-level errors in recent materials, but not as many from earlier units; the same goes for structures. So focus on newer material. Look closely at longer sentences, since this is where it is easier to make mistakes in relating one element to another, or in handling more than a few simple parts.

Language hints:

Simply state the correction: "Nein, nicht [X]. [Y]."
Spell out the correction, if the error is at the word level.

for actual errors

(Ich glaube, das ist) falsch / nicht richtig. • Ich verstehe das nicht.
Was meinen Sie, ([X] oder [Y])? • Schreiben Sie [X], nicht[Y]!
Sie müssen hier [X] schreiben. • ohne/mit • groß/klein • es gibt (kein-)

insufficient length, complexity, etc.

Das ist nicht klar / genug.
Können Sie ein bißchen mehr schreiben / sagen?

Tactful expressions:

vielleicht • Ich glaube • ein bißchen
Ja, das ist (viel) besser. • Ich verstehe das jetzt.
sehr gut! • prima! • ausgezeichnet!

When you work by yourself

On your own you should be able to raise an odd-numbered rating (1, 3, 5) to the next higher even-numbered rating (2, 4, 6). To improve beyond that you almost certainly need some advice from your instructor.

If you received a **5**, all you have to do is check over the text a little more closely than you did when you first wrote it. Just by doing that, you should be able to find and correct errors sufficiently to achieve the 6. Length and complexity are already OK, though you may want to add some more text to make it very clear that you are in close control of recent structures and vocabulary.

If you received a **4**, remember that you have already demonstrated satisfactory performance—not just barely passing, but clearly good. But improving to 5 will help you over the long haul, because you will then have current material under better control and, later, won't have to worry so much about handling this material while you are trying to demonstrate your ability with new language. Advice: 1) first look at any marked errors—you should be able to figure out by yourself what you need to do to correct them; 2) expand your text, especially by using recent structures and vocabulary, because that is where you have shown some insecurity and therefore need practice.

If you received a **3**, you have not yet shown that you can handle current and recent material securely, although you are clearly on the right track. Examine your text for thoughtless errors in reproducing recent vocabulary. Check recent explanations and models of structures, then see where similar features appear in your text, because that's probably where you were notably weak. For each word or phrase where there is an error, try not only to correct it but also to add a similar new item, so that you can find out whether you have improved your capability now and so will make fewer errors than before in using the same sort of language.

If you received a **2**, you clearly fell short of demonstrating competence with new and recent material, and you are also probably weak in older material. If your sample is lengthy but still very flawed, go back and look at any earlier materials; then check for errors in things you thought were easy, because you have probably overestimated your capability even there. If your sample is brief and very flawed, you probably already know that you are having major problems. In either case, ask your instructor or someone who is at a higher level (even a fellow student who received 4 or above), to help you with basic errors first. Then increase the length of your text, but pay careful attention as you go along; try to show your command of earlier language as well as attempting several times to use each newer kind of structure and many words from newer vocabulary.

If you received a **1**, the first thing is to face any problems you are having with motivation and organization. After that, carefully expand your text, paying attention first to the structures and vocabulary of earlier units. Get help checking that over and correcting it. Only then should you work to improve newer features (or add them, if they were not there before).