

Working On It!

Strategies for your writing process

Visual Revision Techniques

Revision can be one of the most challenging parts of the writing process, but incorporating an array of techniques and modes of processing information can help you strengthen and streamline your process. Two techniques we recommend are idea mapping and shuffle editing.

Try It!

Idea mapping

Idea mapping is a freeform representation of ideas and their relationship to one another, often sketched out on a blank piece of paper. Although applicable at any stage of writing, it can be particularly effective for writers working on organization and flow of ideas. To try it, start with your main point at the center and work outward, drawing connections back to your original point. Alternatively, you can also start by writing out all of the ideas you are working with, then drawing connections between them to solidify the crux of your piece.

Shuffle editing

Shuffle editing is a process of cutting apart and reassembling your work that is often helpful for clarifying ideas, organizational flow, and progression of argument. To try it, print out a draft of the document you are working on and cut it apart paragraph-by-paragraph or sentence-by-sentence and shuffle the pieces of paper together. Once the slips are mixed up, start reading through them one at a time and reassemble them in whatever configuration makes sense. You may also want to keep some extra slips of paper handy to quickly add in transitions.

In Practice

I usually struggle greatly with revising, but found the idea mapping and shuffle editing strategies refreshing and invigorating. First, I tried the idea mapping technique, using the central topic of my dissertation to map out related ideas that I explore in my introduction chapter. Even the initial act of writing down ideas I had already established proved interesting, as the mapping encouraged me to clarify connections between ideas and ultimately generated a few new ones as well. With a bit more research, I am excited to see how these discoveries might support my existing claims and impact the structure of my first chapter. I am even considering writing a new introduction altogether with the information I've begun compiling.

Like the idea mapping exercise, I was pleasantly surprised by how enjoyable and effective the shuffle editing method was. Identifying the topic sentence of each cut-up paragraph exposed less-focused and underdeveloped sections, and re-organizing the paragraphs—without looking at the original draft—allowed me to strengthen the scaffolding of the chapter. I also found that using a hard copy of my draft during the revision process literally provided a new perspective on how I might narrow the focus of individual paragraphs, add additional support for each claim, and sequence my argument.

These two techniques may be especially useful for writers who are visual learners, are feeling a sense of stagnancy surrounding their ideas, or want to revise their work but don't know where to begin.

-- Caitlin