

For #3 : A Few Notes on Revision

Paper #3 is a revision of #2, due in class Thursday, September 26 Be sure you have on hand your first versions with readers' comments *and* the handout "Notations (Save This Sheet)."

The point of revision is not primarily to patch up or remedy a poor piece of writing but to bring a potentially good piece of writing to fuller realization. Nor is revision the equivalent of editing. (Edit *after* you revise.) Revision gives you the opportunity to take a close and comprehensive look at what you've written, to reassess the thought and writing, and to look for opportunities to develop, extend, fortify, qualify, or refine the argument of the paper. Here are a few specific revision strategies:

- **Add before cutting.** In most if not all cases, adding substantially new thought is more valuable than retrenching old thought. Therefore, in revising, do *significantly more* than you did in the first version. If the original draws on limited material for support and illustration or refers broadly and abstractly to its sources, return to those sources and draw on them in more detail. If the original drops suggestive remarks that aren't explained or developed, extend them, knitting them securely into your central theme. If the original argues for one point of view against another, entertain and resolve a possible objection to your view. (This is not to discourage deletions in a paper that is cumbersome and wordy or in a paper that has mixed irrelevancies in with its discussion of its central idea.) Except in unusual cases, I'd expect every revision to be longer than the first version: there are no length limits.

- **Consider significant reorganization.** Think seriously about reordering the parts of your essay for greater effectiveness and scope. (There's a reason why your word processor has Cut and Paste commands.) Many people, when they write first versions, tend to figure out what they *really* have to say as they go along. In such cases, it's a **very good idea** to pick up a late-breaking idea from the tail of the paper, feed it into the introduction, and develop it further in a revised version of the body of the paper.

- **One key question: "And so?"** There is almost always one more question to be asked about any clear assertion; it may be quite specific to the nature of your argument or it may take the generic form "And so?" *What follows* from your central contention? How does it change our view of the work(s) or issue(s) on which you are writing? What further question does it leave in its wake? Is the belief in "public sphere" a fiction or illusion that journalists and politicians alike cultivate? *And so?* Why do they do that, and what are the consequences (good and bad) of their behavior? Has public discussion of incipient military action against Iraq been shallow or one-sided or factitious? *And so?* Why, and what does that tell us about the media or about public officials. In this course, a particularly useful question about coverage or debate is this one: *what point of view has been unvoiced, assumed to be inappropriate by all parties, or what question has been unasked, ruled out by the nature of the discourse? What assumption has nobody questioned?* (For reasons that may or may not be obvious, THIS question seems particularly urgent in major current discussions of public policy.) Sometimes the "And so?" question needs answering early in an essay in order to make that essay's thesis whole and logically cogent. Sometimes it needs raising at the end — as a concluding move that points to a further problem raised by what you've already said and shown.

- **More detail from sources, particularly textual detail.** Essays dealing with news coverage of current events face a particular challenge. It is natural to assume that your reader is as well-informed as you are, particularly about materials that are in some degree publicly available. And it is hard to convey detail about as well as detail from the sources you use. Look back at the advice on citation and reference at the end of the assignment sheet for paper #2. If you're uncertain about the MLA-style forms of reference recommended there, go to *Research and Documentation Online* by Diana Hacker at <http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/>. If making reference to electronic documents seems like a challenge (it is for everyone), take a look at the examples from the *Columbia Guide to Online Style* at [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/idx\\_basic.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup/cgos/idx_basic.html).

- **And then, of course, edit:** trim away surplus "metadiscourse" and verbiage; strengthen sentence structure; break up patterns of abrupt or unwieldy sentences; fortify paragraphs and the transitions between them—and correct error. Often, I'll flag several instances of an error or stylistic difficulty, noting that it recurs elsewhere. Editing the whole paper for that problem is up to you.

With your revised version please **return the ORIGINAL version** of the essay, together with my comments and those of other readers. Please feel free to reply to those comments in the margins or at the end of your first version, noting whether and how well I've understood your meaning or giving reasons for what you have or haven't done.