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Self-Revision Exercise: Use this step-by-step process before you pass in your final draft.

Step One: Underline your main idea/point/thesis/judgment.

Note: A judgment or thesis is not a general topic; it is the driving idea that will shape the argument of your paper. Here's an example: In *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the monsters the hero must fight are created unknowingly by his own society."

If your judgment does not have this kind of clarity, is too general or vaguely stated, you need to go back and make it sharper.

Step Two: Put a bracket around the introductory paragraph leading to the thesis.

You may well re-write this to achieve a more nuanced entry into the paper after you've examined your paragraphs for the sub-topics of your argument.

Step Three: Number your paragraphs, re-read each one, and identify the main point of each. Note paragraphs that contain more than one main idea so you can go back and revise them later. Write that point or "none" after the paragraph numbers.

Step Four: Make an outline to determine how the paragraphs are arranged.

Ask: Is this the arrangement of topics that best develops my argument? Chances are you will be able to improve on the arrangement. Now using your outline create the best arrangement you can think of to communicate your argument. Are there any gaps? Have you thought of something new? The goal is to create a structure for your paper that will at once give your reader a clear sense of your perspective and make your argument appear inevitable.

Step Five: Using the magic of word-processing, re-arrange your paper according to the outline you've developed. Next be sure to write clear transition sentences that guide your reader from one sub-topic to the next as flowingly as possible.

Step Six: Now re-read your paper again to make sure you've done all you need to do to support your argument.

Ask: What ideas (or secondary source material) support my point? Hopefully, you will have answered this question, for the most part, in your first draft, or in your re-arrangement of the body of your paper. If not, go deeper, repeating step four as you add additional material.

Important Reminders:

1. Summary or paraphrase does not constitute an adequate approach to interpretation or analysis. Summary or paraphrase must be “arranged” to support your argument; that is, they must be expressly organized around your point or judgment.
2. When using secondary sources, you must cite them appropriately. Follow the guidelines outlined in the MLA Handbook.
3. Remember secondary sources should not be used to summarize your points, but to support your points. Consider responding to a secondary source by either agreeing with it or disagreeing with it. State why you agree or disagree, or show what importance the statement has for your idea.
4. Always edit for spelling, proper word use, run-on sentences, and sentence fragments.
5. If you work hard at this, thinking through your revisions closely and patiently, making sure you’ve expressed yourself as clearly as possible, your work should improve markedly. There is no shortcut on the road to clear writing.

All writers must continually work hard at making their ideas interesting and clear. I continue to use a version of this very exercise in my own critical writing. I find it effective—and I hope you will, too. If you have suggestions about revision—techniques that work well for you—please share them with me and the rest of the class.