

Revision Notes: Moving towards Final Drafts of Research Essay (Due: Tuesday, 12/16)

- As you revise, you should pay particular attention to:
 - The focus/sophistication/clarify/persuasiveness of your argument (both in your opening paragraph and in its development throughout the body of the essay)
 - The quality and incorporation of your research (using a mix of summary, paraphrase, quotations, signal phrases, introducing/contextualizing research)
 - Correct/complete citations (both in-text and Works Cited);
 - Sentence-level issues, including proofreading. Nobody should be turning in a final draft with any typos or other similar errors in it. You should revise your draft thoroughly, including reading it out loud to catch any mistakes/
- Your thesis does not (and should not!) only be one sentence. Remember, it should be a thesis-paragraph.
- Make sure that your **thesis paragraph** provides an outline (a road map) of your research project/argument, not the specifics of background information, quotes, etc. Introduce/define any key terms/concepts here as well. This first paragraph – the thesis paragraph is key: don't start with generalities about well-being/happiness or a basic summary of your broad topic. The purpose of this paragraph is to introduce readers to your focused research topic/question and your specific argument in relation to it. So you should provide only the specific information readers will need to understand your argument in this essay.
- The presentation of your **background information** is crucial so that your readers have the necessary context/info. they need to understand your subject and argument. A lot of you (in your first drafts) started off your first body paragraph with a discussion of happiness/well-being and then moved on. But in almost all case it is important to first present the subject (whether the effects of technology on teens or the relationship between music and mood) and then show how well-being (only a small part of the paper/thesis) is related to it. You might even think of it in terms of comparative analysis, though in this case the two "texts" are larger (your particular topic and well-being/happiness).
- **Lead with your claims (and their significance)** instead of just listing a detail/fact from a source (a lot of you started body paragraphs merely with "another aspect" or "another factor"). You don't want your essay to stay in the same place (horizontal); instead you want it to grow and build with each new paragraph. It is crucial that you use transitions, reflect on the links between your various sentences, ideas, sources (etc.), and then connect the dots for your readers (don't leave them guessing). You need to bring something new to your topic (not just re-presenting back facts). I know that this can seem like a daunting task in a research paper, but remember that synthesizing/integrating all of the information you have found and weaving it together is already a work of intellectual effort (which involves analysis, evaluation, narrative/story-telling, etc.). You want to provide argument and analysis, not merely describe facts.
- **Use transitions to connect your ideas.** Don't have ideas jumbled in the same paragraph or merely string quotes together. Evidence must be clearly introduce, explained, and analyzed. You have to connect the dots for your readers. Clearly explain the significance of your points (it's like baking – you might have all the ingredients on the table, but if you don't know what to do with them, you can't bake the cake!). Really think about the argument/structure of your essay: what do your various paragraphs (and ideas) have to do with each other, other than the fact that they are dealing with happiness in relation to your (broad) topic (which is the most basic connection)? What other deeper, less superficial connections can you highlight for your readers?

- In general, you need to make sure that whatever you write serves a particular purpose. There are many places where you make general statements (ex: happiness is hard to achieve) or hint at some larger point but don't actually take the statement to its logical conclusion (ex: relationships are really important to well-being... ok ... but how/why?). These sections (the majority of the essays) take up precious space but don't add anything significant to the essay. You have to get to the point you faster. So try to completely cut the fluff and then draw out the significance of your points (this is where the "so what?" comes in). Try to avoid fluff, wordiness, repetition, and generality: saying the same thing over and over again in different ways or talking around the text. When you quote, you should comment on/analyze the text rather than merely describing it (move beyond simply providing evidence).
- You will need to return to your research as you revise (and perhaps do additional research to develop your ideas further). Why are the parts of the texts you chose to discuss in your essay (the evidence) important? Grapple with the ideas. Beware of absolutes/over-simplifications – nuances and complexity are interesting. Remember, you don't have either simply agree with the texts or to challenge your research, or argue "against" the authors/texts. What does your approach offer the reader in terms of seeing these texts in a new light? Work on presenting a complex, nuanced argument.
- It is important that your **counter-argument(s)** actually strengthen(s), not weaken(s), your thesis. You can't just give a whole paragraph of negatives (that contradict your thesis) – especially towards the end of your paper – and then dismiss it in one sentence; it is crucial that you engage with the alternative viewpoint (acknowledge that it has some merits, but then show – with qualifications perhaps – how it is insufficient, unconvincing, etc.). You will come across as a more balanced/credible writer in doing so.
- Mostly everyone needs to work on her/his introduction. But in order to figure out what you are (or are not, in some cases!) saying, you need to go back to the body paragraphs. Then get your argument and put it up front. Then go back and make sure each body paragraph supports this main point with evidence and analysis. Then re-write the conclusion (often, the conclusion of your drafts may already have some of your thesis in there). Then check to see (by looking at all of your claims isolated together) if there is development and it makes logical sense. Then revise. Etc. You get it. Writing is recursive, revision, a process. It is ongoing, difficult work.
- Remember that, as always, once you change one thing in your essay, others will need to change as well (**you can't just make revisions in isolation**). If you change your claims in your body paragraph, you have to also update your thesis paragraph. Make sure that you read through your essay multiple times (after you think you are finished!) to ensure that all of its parts fit together well. I would suggest reviewing Harvey's "Elements of an Academic Essay" handout (under "Writing Resources" on OpenLab) too as you revise.
- You should include at least **5 sources** in your Works Cited (no Wikipedia or summary/abstracts from Google Scholar or databases that you may have found; these are starting points, but you should always consult the longer source(s) that they point toward). Images can be used as sources (and included in the body of the essay), but do not count toward this 6 source minimum. Your in-text citations and Works Cited should be in proper MLA style (the correctness of these will count toward your grade on the paper).
- As always, **plagiarism of any kind/quantity will result in an automatic zero on the Research Essay**.
- Use MLA style for paper formatting: Proper heading, page numbers (with last name), Times New Roman font, 1 inch margins, engaging/descriptive titles (not underlined, bolded, or italicized), proper spacing. I have not made comments on formatting and smaller details, but they must be revised/correct for the final draft (ex: correct heading, page numbers, title, Works Cited, citations, writing in third – not first or second – person).