Creative Approaches to Revising Your Essay’s Content and Organization

Developing Content—Adding Ideas to Your Essay

• Pretend to be another person and ask yourself “What would I wonder about this?” Write questions in the margin as you read. Or ask a friend to give you questions regarding what they wonder. Then go back and add in answers to those questions.
• Analyze quotes. For each quote you bring in and cite from a research source, you should have as much (or more!) discussion of the significance of the quote. If you don’t have much discussion of a quote, add more to directly connect the quote to your thesis.
• Write or rewrite the introduction last so that it really introduces the rest of the essay.
• Read through with a highlighter and highlight each place you could be more specific. Then go back and revise those parts.
• For each paragraph answer these questions: What is the purpose of this paragraph? How else could it achieve this purpose? How does it relate to the thesis? What is missing? What would an outside reader want to know? Use these questions to help revise the content.

Thesis or Thesis-Paper Match

• (If the paper needs a thesis statement) After you write the paper, ask yourself “What main point did I end up making?”
• If you started out with a thesis, consider whether the thesis needs to be revised to match with the actual paper.
• Color-code parts of your thesis. Then go through and color-code parts of your essay to make sure the thesis and essay match up in content (and order of main ideas). Change the thesis or essay as needed for a match.

To Organize

• “Fun With Scissors”—Print and cut out paragraphs/sentences and move them around to consider what new order would make the most sense. Consider adding new transitions between parts now that you’ve reordered content. (Note: you can also cut apart a single sentence, keep the key ideas, and then simplify the sentence maintaining those key ideas without unnecessary words).
• Write your key ideas on notecards or post-its, and move the notecards around on a table/floor/wall to help reorder pieces of information, then reorder in your essay.
• Color code ideas by highlighting different colors by theme/topic. Then move everything of the same color to the same part of the paper.