Final Revisions Checklist

You’ve worked hard writing your paper. But when is it really ready to be turned in? This handout will help you polish your paper by showing you how to double-check main components and make a few final revisions. It’s easier to spot errors on a hard copy, so print your paper and check off the following items. Remember that ultimately, you have to be the one to decide when you’re satisfied.

First and foremost:
• Find your thesis and underline it. Does it clearly answer the prompt?
• Identify the topic of each body paragraph, and write it out to the side. Do these subtopics support your thesis?
• Label the introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion in the margin. Have you clearly organized your argument?
• Make sure you’ve used transitions between paragraphs or distantly related thoughts.
• Check your documentation of sources. Have you followed one of the major style guides (MLA, APA, Chicago or IEEE)? Is it the one your professor specified?

While reading your paper, look for:
• Spelling mistakes that the spell check may have missed. For example, perhaps you meant to type the word work, but instead typed word. Spell check won’t catch this error, but it will be glaringly obvious to your professor or TA.
• Awkward grammar. Don’t rely on the computer’s grammar check! Do you use commas or “to be” verbs (is, are, was, were) excessively? These are often indicators of an awkward sentence. Watch out for passive voice as well, and change it to active voice where possible. When in doubt, keep your sentences as simple as possible. A more complex sentence isn’t always a better sentence.
• Redundant sentence structures. Do you use the same sentence structure again and again Varying the syntax makes reading more interesting for your audience.
• The overall flow of your paper. Do your ideas logically follow one another to create a complete argument? Do paragraphs contain related information?
• The tone and word choice. Have you written appropriately for your audience?

Additional Strategies
• Have someone else read your paper. Listen to their comments and make appropriate changes if necessary.
• Don’t try to make all your revisions at once. As you go through your paper, quickly correct the things you can and then move on and mark those passages that still need work. Continue doing this until you have attended to all the trouble spots.
• Visit the Undergraduate Writing Center for more help. A consultant will be glad to talk with you about your final revisions.