<u>Revision Tips</u>

What are some quick ways to know what to revise?

Many of the words and phrases that seem most natural to use when we're writing are actually filler words: they fill in the spaces while we're thinking as we write and help us initially get ideas down on paper. They're handy words for writing a rough draft, but when we think more carefully about them, we realize they may not say anything specific, may be vague, may be overstating a point, or may be taking the long way around to a point.

They are especially handy words for knowing what to revise. Consider them red flags in your writing, calling to you, saying, "Revise me! Make your writing stronger, more concrete, flowing! Revise me!"

Here are ten of these handy words for helping you express ideas in the first place and then for knowing what needs to be revised.

<u>Top Ten Words and Phrases to Revise:</u>

1. "Thing/s": Find a specific word. Often an indicator of a clichéd expression, vagueness, wordiness.
   a. Original: The Romans had built a strong and powerful empire based on certain values and the last thing they needed was a new rapidly growing religion to break down their government and deplete their wealth.
   b. Revised: The Romans had built a strong and powerful empire based on certain values and did not want a new rapidly growing religion to break down their government and deplete their wealth.
2. "There are" and "There is": Can the noun that follows this phrase be made into the subject of the sentence with an action verb? "To be" verbs in general are often places where you can use an action verb for a more focused, powerful sentence. "There" just adds an extra layer of padding, in most cases.
   a. Original: There is no doubt that Christian and Roman values conflicted. [unsupportable claim—impossible to prove that no one at any time had no doubt]
   b. Revised: Christian and Roman values conflicted … [state the claim and finish with specifics about the conflict that the essay will support with evidence]
3. Standalone "This " with no noun following it and no concrete referent: Follow it with a specific noun or phrase, like "this action."
   a. Original: The earliest Christian influence in Rome provoked suspicion and dislike, particularly from Roman rulers. This gradually escalated into a great conflict involving trials and public martyrdom for centuries, as it became more and more apparent that neither side was willing to compromise their values.
   b. Revised: The earliest Christian influence in Rome provoked suspicion and dislike, particularly from Roman rulers. This distrust gradually escalated into a great conflict involving trials and public martyrdom for centuries, as it became more and more apparent that neither side was willing to compromise their values.

4. "It": Give "it" a concrete referent, or use a specific word or phrase: "The text contradicted itself" versus "It contradicted itself." Words like "it" are frequently indicators of clunky sentences that need revision in various ways.
    a. Original: To elaborate more upon this idea, it was stated in the Gospel of Matthew 6:19-20, "Do not store…."
    b. Revised: The Gospel of Matthew further explained the Christian focus on rewards in heaven, not in this world: "Do not store..." (6:19-20).
5. "Etc." or "and so on": Use phrases like "such as" and "including" when introducing a list that is not comprehensive.
6. "Somewhat," "sort of," "kind of," "like," "more or less": Use specific phrasing to qualify a point.
    a. Original: We more or less see Tacitus' disapproval for this deity worship when he compares it to a less barbarous ritual: "Hercules and Mars they appease with more lawful offerings".
    b. Revised: Tacitus expresses his disapproval of deity worship requiring human sacrifice by contrasting it to less barbaric German rituals, noting, for instance, that "Hercules and Mars they appease with more lawful offerings." [Notice that the original was sloppy with language in numerous ways, which is often the case when using #6-type phrases. Look around wherever you find them, and think about the most precise and concise way to make the point.]
7. "Never," "always," "obviously," "definitely," "absolutely": Think! Make a point that you can support with evidence.
8. "Every single person," "everybody," "everyone," "all," "everything," "anything": Think! Make a point that you can support with evidence.
    a. Original: After the Romans used widespread commercial networks to establish a stable reign over their vast empire, Rome became known as the Pax Romana where everything was uniform, reliable, and tolerable.
    b. Revised: After the Romans used widespread commercial networks to establish a stable reign over their vast empire, Rome became known as the Pax Romana where life was generally uniform, reliable, and tolerable. [note that this sentence still raises issues because it assumes that the Pax Romana was what it purported to be, but scholars argue that the term was a form of propaganda.]
9. "One": "One" often uses "one" to avoid saying "I" or "you," but then one's writing may sound stiff and awkward. Try "we" when being inclusive makes sense: "We all struggle at times with the use of personal pronouns in formal writing." Use "I" when you are talking about your own experiences, thoughts, and feelings and want to make a point about yourself, and use "you" when you want to directly address the reader—"I'm talking to you!"
10. "The ____dictionary defines _____ as": Unless you want to emphasize which dictionary you used, start with the word you are defining. Put the focus on the word and its meaning, and cite the dictionary internally using MLA format.

How do you find these words and phrases quickly for revision? Use the search function in your word processing program, and search for "things," for instance, if you know you tend to use the word. We all have our favorite words and phrases—"crutch" words. Get to know yours, and search for them, and you will know what to revise.