

Revising and Editing

Erin collected the comments about her draft. To help her focus on the purpose of the essay, she reread the assignment. She decided that reflecting more would strengthen her main idea, or thesis—and her instructor had already pointed out the importance of a strong thesis in college writing.

Erin concentrated first on revising her conclusion because all her readers had suggested strengthening it. Then she went back to the beginning to make other changes, responding to comments and editing details. Erin's changes are marked in the following version of her draft. The comments in the margins point out some of her revision and editing decisions.

Revised and Edited Draft

In order to fully appreciate something, to realize its value, one often must experience its beginning and its end. For example, to learn and appreciate all the material in a textbook chapter, reading and understanding must take place from the introduction to the conclusion. A book is not enjoyable from start to finish, nor is a movie cut short before the ending is revealed. My appreciation of life came in a most unexpected connection between life's beginning and its end.

Mr. Hertli was a brilliant old Swiss man whom I assisted every week for the last two years of my high school career. He lived down a winding road, surrounded by trees, grazing horses, and the occasional house. Trees arched over his steep driveway, as if bowing to all who enter, welcoming anyone with insight, help, or simply company. Mr. Hertli's house was of a very traditional build, and was surrounded by nature. Goats fed on grasses and horses galloped and played within a fenced-off grazing area. Ducks swam on a pond and dozens of sun-colored butterflies danced around bunches of tall purple flowers between which a few stepping-stones were nestled, as a walkway to the front door.

Inside sat Mr. Hertli, always rocking in a chair and listening to “books-on-tape” in one of the various languages familiar to him. He was thin, and elderly, and wore dress slacks and a suit jacket no matter what the occasion. His leather shoes were obviously very old, and wear which told stories of Switzerland, war, research, and accomplishment. Mr. Hertli also wore dark sunglasses morning and evening to protect the mere one or two percent of his eye sight that had not yet been stolen from him by macular degeneration.

Mr. Hertli was an accomplished man. He had been through immigration, served the United States in war, earned various degrees, a book on evolution and creationism, and was fighting for his life against a terminal lung disease. He was extremely intelligent, and it was my job to read him scientific journals and books, record information and data for his next work-in-progress, manage his correspondence, fill out paperwork, dispense his medications, and do nearly all the things a blind person do alone.

One particular day, I was assisting Mr. Hertli in his office. Crimson carpeting lined the floor of the tiny literature-crammed room. Journals and books lay sprawled on every surface, and there was a desk and two chairs somewhere in all the mess. A cord around Mr. Hertli's head fed oxygen through his nose, while the other end trailed out the door, down the steps, and into the living room where an oxygen-dispensing machine constantly sat, always humming. We sorted through music, storing old German and Swiss instrumental classics on a new device for the blind which stored numerous songs, audio books, and other audio literature for playback. As we waited for the media to download into the device, Mr. Hertli inquired about recent political events concerning the country of Georgia. He desired to know the geographic location of Georgia. “Read the atlas,” he said, and although I had grown to understand and love his thick European accent, I sat, staring at him in bafflement at his words, which he, fortunately, could not see. I reached under a desk and pushed past books about Darwin, God, evolution, and history, and found a large, blue-covered atlas, aged by years of learning and discovery, and research. Brushing the dust off, I opened the book to the index, and searched for “Georgia.” I turned to the page to which the index directed me, and unsuccessfully tried to describe Georgia's relation to Turkey, Russia, and Azerbaijan. “Show me!” he said. Show him! How could I, for he could not see after all, and now I had to find a way to make him see!

I placed the wide atlas across his wobbly knees, in his lap, facing him. Taking his hand, I slowly directed Mr. Hertli's finger around the perimeter of each country, saying, “This is Turkey. To the east, here is Georgia.” He pointed and repeated the countries back to me, and I asserted that, yes, that was Azerbaijan, or Russia.

It was as though I were teaching a small child, who could not read, and who did not know the least about geography. And how strange it was to be feeling such a way. After all, I was helping a well-educated, cultured man, in a this most elementary, basic way! In this aged man, nearing the end of his life, I saw the character of a young boy, beginning to learn a concept new to him.

This would be the last time I helped Mr. Hertli, as I would be beginning college just a few days later. Mr. Hertli was now completely blind. Like a mother afraid to send her child to school for the first time, I was afraid to cease my assistance of this seemingly helpless man. For when I had seen this connection, the young, new child in the old, I came to realize just how valuable life itself is. Mr. Hertli showed me how our younger selves provide deep roots for us as we get older and how our older selves still preserve our youth. Young and old, we are all somehow connected, one and the same, no one being of greater worth than the other. No matter our age, we will always have this link, through generations, and I have grown to appreciate this of life.

After Erin finished revising and editing, she spell-checked her final version and proofread it one more time. Then she submitted her final draft.

? What is your revision plan for your draft?

? What changes do you want to mark in your draft?

1 *Oops! What about a title? Just Mr. Hertli?*

Focus looks OK here.

2 *Need to write out numbers that are a word or two*

3

Too much repetition—plus wordy

4

Make this one word

My goal—set the scene but drop extra words!

Too much detail here?

Check commas—end of the textbook

Luckily my reader asked about the spelling.

6

#15 set up situation—this #1 tells what happened

7

Combine with #6—event with meaning?

8

My big goal here is adding more reflection.

I want to show how old and young connect.

? How might you strengthen your essay as you revise and edit?

For more on the MLA paper format, see A in the Quick Format Guide, p. Q-1.