TIP 3: HOW CAN I BETTER REVISE MY OWN WRITING?

Vary Sentence Patterns
When you’re revising your writing, one thing you might want to look at is if you have a variety of sentence patterns. There are two patterns that we see too much of in The Writing Centre. The first is starting your sentence with “This is...,” “There is...,” or “It is...” If you have a number of sentences in a paragraph, or throughout your essay, that begin like this, I recommend that you change some of them for the sake of variety. It is boring for the reader to read the same pattern over and over again.

Another overused sentence pattern is to start with a transition word, like “however,” “therefore,” “as a result,” “in addition,” followed by a comma. What happens is that you get a pattern that goes transition word, comma, rest of sentence:

“However, there are many people who disagree.”
Or, “Therefore, we can see that the result is inconclusive.”

The result is that this rocky sentence pattern can make the reader feel a bit seasick. It’s a little bit too much if it’s every sentence. One of the things you can do when you’re revising your writing is check to see if you’ve used this pattern too much in one paragraph. Does every sentence start with a transition word? Transition words are really important but shouldn’t be overused. Likewise, this sentence pattern is perfectly okay to use; just be sure that it’s in balance with other kinds of sentence patterns.

Make a Post-outline
You may have heard of the trick of making an outline before you write a paper or an essay to make sure that your writing stays on track, but did you know you can also use a post-outline to check your writing to make sure that it stayed on track? This is a really useful tool, especially if you find that outlining before you write doesn’t really work for you. After you’ve written your paper, you can make a post-outline by identifying what is the thesis statement, what are the main points that you’re trying to make, and how are you strengthening those main points with examples or citations from secondary sources. So, for example, pull out your thesis statement. In one sentence, what is your paper trying to say? Or, what is the argument you are trying to make? Then, pull out those two, three, or four main arguments that you are using to support your thesis statement. Then, pull out and identify what are those supporting points that support the main arguments that support the thesis sentence. This way you can be sure that your essay lines straight up and down – thesis statement, A, B, C, with supporting points for A, B, and C:

Thesis Statement:
Main Argument A
  Supporting Point/Example A
  Supporting Point/Example B
If you use a post-outline, you might find that your essay sort of suffers from what we call “drift,” which means that you started in one place and it sort of ends up in another. Using a post outline can help you identify what parts need to be added to or deleted, in order to pull it in line so that your essay starts at the top and finishes straight down at the bottom.

**Tone: Academic or not?**

When revising your writing, it’s important to pay attention to the tone that it’s written in. The tone should match the audience (the people who are going to read it), and it should also match your discipline. So, if you are writing a lab report, research paper, or a traditional essay, you’ll want the tone to be academic. To check to see whether the tone of your paper is academic or not, look for conversational words, like “sort of,” “a lot,” or “totally.” These are words that are perfect for conversation but are not very appropriate for academic writing. As well, you’ll want to look at the word “I”: the first person “I” as in “I believe” or “I think.” It’s appropriate in some disciplines to use “I” in your academic writing, whereas in other disciplines, it’s not appropriate. If you are not sure, ask your instructor or take a look at some of the readings that you’ve been assigned to see whether or not they use the first person.