

Ratiocination

Ratiocination usually means to reason with a process. Strictly speaking, this is revising with a process, but let's not quibble about semantics. Use this method to edit your own or a peer's paper.

If you have five different colors of pencils or highlighters, this is easy. Otherwise, you will need to figure out another way to distinctively mark each separate item.

1. "To be or not to be?" When you're writing, most often the answer to that question is "not to be." It is nobler in the mind to figure out more action verbs. Using a colored pencil or highlighter (or another distinctive marking method), circle every form of the verb "to be" you find in the paper. When you're finished, write the number of "to be" verbs at the top of the paper. When you revise, try as much as possible to cut the number of "to be" verbs in half. Reminder - "to be" verbs include (but are not limited to):

be	are
being	was
been	were
am	is

2. Next, we need to examine sentence length and (gasp!) fragments and run-ons. Using two different colors, you will mark your sentences. This really works best with highlighters. Using the first color, highlight or underline the first sentence on the paper. Using the second color, highlight or underline the second sentence on the paper. Continue highlighting the rest of the paper, alternating these two colors. When you are finished, evaluate your sentence length. Are all of your sentences short? Do you vary the length, or are your sentences all about the same length? Did you find any fragments or run-ons (heaven forbid!). Make sure the pattern of sentence lengths varies.
3. This step will help you change the beginnings of your sentences. Box the first word of each sentence (in a different color, if you have it). Did you notice a pattern? Are you beginning too many sentences the same way? Make sure you vary the beginnings of your sentences.
4. Now let's rid ourselves of those "banned words." Mark instances of words such as *very, got, get, nice, bad, thing, good, stuff, awesome, wonderful* and *so*. Try to use more vivid words in their place. These words are kind of like clichés. They don't really have much punch. Note: if you are using "so" at the beginning of a sentence, chances are that it is a transition, and you don't need to change it.