

Reading papers aloud is a very simple but powerful revision strategy that you can employ to develop both the argumentative and stylistic dynamics of any piece of writing. This strategy can be effective as you revise your own writing or as you discuss another writer's work during a peer-review or group setting.

Reading Aloud To Revise Your Own Work

Our mouths typically work much slower than our brains; as a result, reading aloud forces the brain to slow down and examine the piece of writing more carefully and from a different perspective. Reading aloud will allow you to hone in on the types of mistakes, particularly surface-level grammatical mistakes, which are often overlooked as you read the paper silently.

When you read aloud, the process engages multiple senses. For example, seeing and hearing simultaneously can enable you to pick up on mistakes you may have missed if only one of your senses were engaged.

Good writing has rhythm and flow. When you hear yourself reading a paper, you can begin to hear the musicality (or lack thereof) in your own prose. Pay close attention to sentences or passages that make you stumble as you read. They may need to be revised either because the ideas lack clarity or the prose is awkwardly phrased.

Reading aloud can also help you address broader organizational issues that a paper may have. Sometimes, it is easier to hear than see when an argument has lost focus.

Reading Aloud During Peer-Review

Reading aloud can also be a helpful strategy while working with a partner or a group. This strategy can work several different ways: you could read your own paper aloud to a partner, you could have your partner read your paper aloud to you, or you and your partner could alternate reading portions of the paper aloud.

If you and your partner are reading your own papers aloud to one another, you should consult one another to determine each of your goals for the peer-review. Ask your partner whether he or she is interested in global, local, or surface level revisions. This knowledge can help determine whether you will have your partner read the entire paper at once, read paragraph by paragraph, or sentence by sentence.

As your partner is reading through his or her draft, take notes on a different sheet of paper or make tick marks on the draft to remind you of passages to which you wish to return.

If you do not have time to hear your partner's entire paper, "glossing" can be a valuable tool. Using this technique, you will skim through each paragraph of your partner's paper, after which you will recapitulate the main idea of the paragraph and attempt to anticipate which direction the paper will go from here. This will enable your partner to see how a reader is reacting to the structure and argument of the paper as he or she reads through the paper.

Reverse outlining is another strategy that will work well to accompany the reading of a text. As you listen to your partner read his or her paper, stop periodically and get your partner to write down a brief summary of each paragraph. Then, ask your partner what he or she intended to accomplish in the paragraph and how well he or she thinks the paragraph succeeded. Also, ask your partner to relate the argument of each paragraph back to the global arguments of the paper. This will enable him or her to discern if and how well the paragraph is working in service of the paper's main claims. (Please see the "Handouts and Resources" page of the Duke Writing Studio website for a more thorough description of reverse outlining: http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/reverse-outline.original.pdf.)

Reading your partner's paper aloud to him or her can also be very beneficial. This is particularly true if your partner is nervous or uncomfortable reading his or her own work. If your partner has to concentrate all of his or her mental energy overcoming nervousness or simply reading the paper, he or she may not be able to focus on the content or grammar of the essay. Reading your partner's paper to him or her will give your partner the chance to step outside his or her own mind and hear the prose as an audience member would. Your partner then will begin to notice the places in the prose that cause the reader some kind of difficulty, such as pausing unnecessarily or stumbling over awkward phrases.

Whether reading your own paper to a partner or hearing a partner read his or her paper, remember that reading aloud can be a very daunting endeavor. Most likely, the peer-review will be more productive if you are as accommodating and encouraging as possible.