



Cut and Restructure

This “revision arts and crafts” technique requires hard copies of drafts and scissors, so remind students to bring hard copies with them. I usually loan the scissors and sometimes pair this activity with color coding, so some students are working with crayons while others are cutting.

How It Works

Students begin by cutting their essays into paragraphs and then whether each paragraph needs to be cut into even smaller segments. If a paragraph has a logical split in the middle, cut it at the split. If a paragraph feels like several disconnected sentences, cut it into individual sentences. Students will then have a pile of small papers.

After cutting, students should spread out all the pieces in front of them, along with some blank papers. On a large table or on the floor, students should rearrange the pieces, experimenting with various configurations.

What if this is the first piece of the essay? Or what if this is? If students can't find a piece that sounds like it should go first, they can place a blank scrap at the top of the desk or floor area. What should go next? And after that? At any place where nothing among the papers fits, insert a blank scrap; if they have a sense of what information belongs in that blank space, they can jot a few words on the blank paper. They should feel comfortable trying pieces out in different spots.

When students are content with where each piece fits, they can staple or tape the pieces together and start filling in the blanks. Any leftover pieces indicate ideas that didn't belong in the first place or that were covered elsewhere, so they can throw those pieces away. Throwing away leftover writing on paper is easier than deleting words from a document. Students are often happy to see those pieces go because, during the activity, they struggled to place them.

Once the essay is reconstructed, students can return to the screen and rearrange the essay to replicate the hard copy model.



Why It Works

This activity quickly advances the revision process. It offers language for discussing their work, noting places where another piece of blank paper might have helped or where a paragraph could have been cut further.

Arts and crafts revision is more time consuming than many other activities on this site. You can ask students to experiment outside of class, but it's probably worth taking a single class period, if you can spare it, to show them these skills. After students have tried these techniques once with your oversight, they can continue independently on future assignments.