**How can I help students understand, be comfortable with, and even welcome the revision process by creating a “culture of revision” in writing workshop?**

By Tracy Velez

“Clear writing is the result of a lot of tinkering.” William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*

**Learning Objectives:**

* You will create a piece of text to “tinker” with and practice a revision strategy
* You will participate in a discussion about the strategies you and others used as well as strategies you may have experienced previously and how they influenced your writing
* You will have an opportunity to consider and share how to use strategies to help create a habit of revision in students (and yourself!)

**CCSS: ELA**

**W9-10.5:** Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

**W9-10.10:** Write routinely over extended time frames and shorter time frames for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences

**Context and Background:** In my Honors 9 Writing Workshop, I chose to use a portfolio as a final assessment. The students had various major, minor, and revised pieces required in the final portfolio, and each piece had received feedback earlier in the year. Our workshop time provided lots of writing time, teacher conferencing, peer conferencing, and mini-lessons on craft, but at the end of the semester when all their drafts stacked up against each other, the majority of students had done very little revising and only editing. I knew that I needed to ramp up my mini-lessons on revision, but not only that, I needed to help the students make revision the way they write, not an optional step.

**Lesson:**

1. **Read:** an excerpt from Sandra Cisnero’s “Straw into Gold” and one or two of Pablo Neruda’s food odes. Use these mentor texts and creative mediums as a springboard into some writing of our own. Start with a quick list of food memories: consider favorites, detested, symbolic nature, what or where you wish you could eat, metaphors for your life, etc.
2. **Write:** for a few minutes on your medium of choice (journals work too) about an item on your list. Be sure this is something you are comfortable sharing with at least one person.
3. **Review:** Gallagher’s RADaR chart and the provided list of revision strategies and consider how you might apply these techniques to your own writing.
4. **Re-see**: Take a minute to briefly read over what you’ve written and circle, underline, or star the tasty parts.
5. **Re-hear**: With your table partner, share all or a portion of your writing by reading aloud. If you are brave enough, you could ask them to read a portion aloud. Respond to your partner by sharing what you felt was interesting, inviting, inspiring, surprising, funny, delicious, so on. (Group question: how did that feel? What did you gain from that process?)
6. **Rewrite:** Choose a revision strategy that you feel best fits your piece or will challenge your writing. Take into consideration the feedback and thoughts you just experienced.
7. **Share:** (if time permits) with your table partner how your writing changed after using a revision technique.
8. **Group Discussion**: Anyone willing to share an excerpt from writing and how it changed? How did you feel about revising? What might encourage you to do this more often in your writing? How can this process be more exciting or natural for students?

**RADaR: The Four Steps of Revision**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **R** | **A** | **D and** | **R** |
| **Replace…**  …words that are not specific  …words that are overused  …sentences that are unclear | **Add…**  …new information  …descriptive adjectives and  adverbs  …rhetorical or literary devices | **Delete…**  …unrelated ideas  …sentences that sound good but  create unity problems  …unwanted repetition  …unnecessary details | **Reorder…**  …to make better sense or to flow  better  …so details support main ideas  …to avoid “bed-to-bed” writing |
| For example:  *Before*  As I ran to the finish line, my heart was beating.  *After*  As I sprinted to the tape, my heart was pounding in my chest. | For example:  *Before*  Shadows made the night seem scary.  *After*  Ominous shadows made the dark night seem even more frightening. | For example:  *Before*  The candidates talked about the issues, and many of the issues were issues that had been on the voters’ minds.  *After*  The candidates talked about the issues, many of which had been on the voters’ minds. | For example:  *Before*  Put the sunflower seeds over the strawberries, which are on top of the pineapple in the bowl. You’ll have a delicious fruit salad.  *After*  To make a delicious fruit salad, cut pineapples into a bowl. Add strawberries and then sprinkle a few sunflower seeds over the top. |

“You must remember that “all first-draft writing – whether produced by students or by professional writers- is usually lousy.” Kelly Gallagher, *Write Like This.*

**Resources:**

Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle.* 2nd ed. Portsmouth, 1998.

Ballenger, Bruce. *The Curious Writer.* New York: Pearson, 2009.

Burke, Jim. *The English Teacher’s Companion.* 3rd ed. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2008.

Gallagher, Kelly. *Write Like This.* Portland, ME: Steinhouse, 2011.

Murray, Donald M. *Learning by Teaching.* Montclair: Boynton, 1982.

Robbins, Bruce and Maggie Chase. “Getting Quality Revision from Students Writers.” Boise State University. Portland Marriott, NCTE Regional Conference. 3 March 2014.

Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well*. 6th ed. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

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THOUGHTS ON REVISION

“Clear writing is the result of tinkering.”

“Rewriting consists of reshaping and tightening and refining the raw material you wrote on your first try. [It] is the essence of writing well: it’s where the game is won or lost.”

-William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*

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“Re means ‘again.’ Vision means ‘to see.’ Thus, revision means to see your paper again in a new light.”

-Kelly Gallagher, *Write Like This*

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“If students read aloud each sentence they’ve written and keep revising or fiddling with it till it feels right in the mouth and sounds right in the ear, the resulting sentence will be clear and strong.”

-Peter Elbow, “Revising by Reading Aloud. What the Mouth and Ear Know.”

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“When revision is encouraged, not as a punishment but as a natural process in the exploration of the text to discover meaning, then basic writers become motivated to revise.”

-Donald Murray, *Learning By Teaching*

A Collection of Revision Strategies:

* **Sensory Detail:** Review your draft for places where you can add the five senses (possibly replacing less descriptive language).
* **Looping:** Circle a word or phrase and write more about that piece to consider as an addition.
* **POV/Voice Shift:** Consider telling or writing from a new perspective. Who else could tell your story? Another character? First person? How about the weekend you versus the professional you?
* **Genre Shift:** Try transforming your piece into a letter to the editor, love letter, movie script, menu, obituary, etc. You may find that this works well for just a portion of your draft.
* **Outline:** *After* writing the draft, outline what you have written by crafting summary sentences for portions of the piece.
* **Concept Map:** This is another pre-writing tool that gives us a backwards approach to see what could be added, clarified, or focused in revision. Pick a topic, phrase, line, idea and use a spider web diagram to brainstorm.
* **Timeline:** Draw out the timeline of your story, labeling the major events. What can be added? Can you shift the focus to a different time or shorter length of time? Consider how flashbacks and flash forwards might add to the story.
* **Smoothing**: Count the syllables in a few of your sentences to look for a variety of sentence length and pauses. If the sentences tend to fall into a pattern of the same approximate number of syllables before a pause (period, comma, semi-colon, etc.), try combining sentences, adding or changing punctuation, deleting words, and varying sentence length. Read aloud before and after the changes.
* **Cut the cliché**: Circle any phrases or sayings in your work that seem to be overused or cliché and write, in your own words, what you really mean when you use that phrase. Consider replacing the expression with your own fresh words.
* Jim Burke’s **Grammar Considerations**: Can you switch out any verbs for something that is more active or powerful? Also look at your nouns. Jim Burke says, “Students often write *car* when they could write *Ford* *Mustang*, or *woman* when they mean *bride* or *Penelope, Odysseus’ wife*.” Consider writing one or two alternatives to your nouns that are more precise and detailed. Read aloud before and after making changes.
* **Zoom In**: Narrow down the story to capture one specific moment. I tell my students, “Don’t just write about the Disneyland trip; tell about throwing up on the roller coaster!” Work with just that moment to show the detail and emotion and the five senses (“Ewww, Mrs. Velez!”).
* **\*\*\*Answer your Question**: After reading your piece, consider if there might be an underlying question in your writing (or a few, for that matter). For example, my name project essay may have had the question, “How has the history of my family name shaped who I am?” Jot these questions down and write a few sentences in answer to the question. Now look back at your original draft. Could these answers provide more focus, detail or specific language to your piece? Alternately, if no obvious question emerges, try asking yourself: *What do I now understand that I did not understand before I wrote this?* Write a few sentences to answer this and consider replacing text or adding to the original draft.
* **\*\*\*Fresh Start:** After completing your first draft, read it aloud, circle and star the pieces you think are working well and spend a few minutes admiring it. Now turn to a fresh page and start all over. You are welcome to use any of the material from your first draft, but you may want to challenge yourself not to look back. Try incorporating what you really liked while getting more specific.
* **\*\*\***Donald Murray’s **“Instructive Line”:** Circle the line or phrase that seems to be *most* significant in your piece. Write this down on a fresh page and do a few minutes of freewriting related to that line. This material may have pieces to add to your original draft.