

Revision Script

This workshop has been designed for a 50-minute class, and should last no more than 45 minutes if run as efficiently as possible. In longer classes, this leaves extra time which can be used either for other (non-Writing-Studio-assisted) class activity or for extending the time allotted for the activities below.

Note to Consultant: While this script is full of content, it should not be seen as strict or constraining; rather, it is designed to provide guidelines upon which you can rely, but which you can also depart from. Your role in facilitating a workshop is to generate and guide conversation, so do what works for the class. Also keep in mind that if you have a way of talking with clients about, for instance, thesis statements that you find more useful or that better suits your own style, then please feel free to make use of that, or even to rewrite any portion of the script for yourself—this can help to make you a more comfortable and effective facilitator. However, if you are nervous about being in front of a class and not knowing what to say, this script should provide a useful resource to which you can turn at any point.

Materials Required

- From Writing Studio:** Index cards for minute papers; Handouts: [“Revision”](#), [“Questions to Ask when Revising”](#), & [“Revision Activities”](#), Note Cards potentially for activity 2, Pens
- From Instructor:** Please provide consultant with copy of assignment or prompt prior to workshop. Please prepare to speak to students about your own revision process (instructors are welcome to bring their own writing to revise).
- From Students:** First draft—*note that this is a workshop that should be conducted after students have completed a first draft of their papers, and they should be instructed to bring these drafts with them.*

Objectives

- Students will better understand that revision is more about higher order, big picture, concerns rather than mere proofreading.
- Students will be introduced to, and given opportunities to try out, a few revision techniques.

Plan

I. Concentrated Writing Studio Presentation (5 min.)

II. What is revision? (5 min.)

Begin by asking students what they do, or think they should do, when revising a paper.

Ask the instructor about his or her own writing process in this regard. Here are some questions to ask:

- What is your revision process?
- How do you focus your revisions?
- How many times do you revise any given work?

Emphasize two main things about revision: 1) It is big-picture/higher-order-concern-oriented rather than simply proofreading; 2) It provides the writer with an opportunity to consider their work from an external, audience perspective. Think about the effect that their language, reasoning, and structure will have on a reader. In discussion, consider mentioning:

- Literally, “**revision**” means “**re-seeing.**” Revision is the step in the writing process in which you work to view your paper from a different perspective, as if you were someone else (your audience, for example).
- Revision is first and foremost about large-scale concerns like analysis, organization, ideas, voice, style, and tone. Addressing these larger concerns is often a more effective use of time, and will strengthen papers more substantially and efficiently than dwelling at the level of words and sentences.
- Spotting grammatical and mechanical problems is often a concern best taken up late in the revision process. Much more important is **the need to see the big picture**, the overall effect. Consider the structure, the level of complexity. Read for fluency and precision. Step back and imagine you're another person coming to this piece for the first time.
- Examples of **revision**:
 - reorganizing to provide a single, clear, over-arching structure to your paper
 - refining a thesis statement and supplying new evidence to support it
 - introducing opposing evidence (by citing authors who make points that challenge yours)
 - ...and refuting that evidence (by citing additional evidence that answers the challenges)
 - deleting paragraphs that do nothing to advance your argument, and perhaps replacing them with additional paragraphs (supported with evidence)

So we turn now to the paper you brought with you to work on revising. You need a pen, and either a fresh sheet of paper or note cards. (*Distribute materials (all handouts, etc.) at this time*). Here are three handouts that will be useful resources for you when revising. One has a description of some of the activities we will be doing today, while the other two have more activities for you to try on your own time and questions you might want to ask yourself when revising, with recommendations for activities to go with each question.

III. Activity 1—Memory Draft (5 min.)

(Note: If the students are just getting papers back from the professor, they will not be able to do a memory draft. Simply move on to the reverse outline, which might take them slightly longer since they will need to refresh their memories of their papers.)

First, set aside what you've written. Without looking at your paper, try to rewrite your introduction and thesis—that is, the main point of your essay—from memory. (If this is a research paper, try to write a memory abstract).

- Having written your paper, you may now have a better sense of what you are doing in the paper than when you started, and this 'memory draft' may help you identify or clarify just what that is.
- You may find that you've stated things more clearly or concisely here than in the paper.
- Later, when we are working on our drafts, we can compare what we have written here to the paper itself, to see if the paper reflects our thesis and what we want to be doing and saying with our essay.

Give students 3 or 4 minutes to do this. Briefly discuss what they thought of being asked to recall without the aid of their draft and what they think it might offer them upon actually looking at the paper again later.

IV. Activity 2—(**Note:** *You have a choice of two possible activities here, as well as some variations involving peer review/pair share. **Instructor** may have a preference (consult him or her beforehand) or consider which best suits the class or assignment. In any case, allow roughly 20 min. for this activity.*)

A. Option One—Reverse Outline—*Draw attention to **Activities Handout** to save time*

Some writers find it helpful to make an outline before writing, but sometimes it is helpful to work in the *opposite* direction. A reverse outline, which one makes *after* writing a draft, allows you to see the structure of your argument as a whole. It helps you focus on maintaining your core aim and conceptual focus throughout your paper, paragraph by paragraph, and can help you determine whether your paper should be reorganized; where there are leaps in your argument, gaps to bridge, points that don't flow. This technique is helpful in reconsidering the organization and coherence of an essay. By figuring out what each paragraph contributes to your paper, you will be able to see where each fits best within it. The Reverse Outline is good for quickly finding material that needs substantial revision.

*Direct students to **Activities Handout** for Reverse Outline Instructions, reproduced below. Have students focus first on just the first four steps—give them 5 minutes for these.*

To make a reverse outline:

1. Number the paragraphs of your paper.
2. On a separate sheet of paper, or using the note cards, list the number of paragraphs in your paper, giving a line or two for each number (or a card for each)
3. Turn to your paper, read the first paragraph, and write on your list or card the main point you make in this paragraph.
 - a. If you can't summarize the content of a paragraph, you probably have multiple ideas in play in that paragraph that may need revising; note each of the ideas expressed in the paragraph.

4. Do the same for each paragraph of your paper in turn.

After students have done this, guide them through the last two reflection steps, giving 2-3 minutes for #5 and using the rest of the time for #6 and comparison with memory draft.

Note: Students who have used note cards will be more prone to focus on organization, so make sure they try to think about each reflection question below.

5. Now focus on your list (or cards), which reflects the direction of your paper
 - a. How well does the list cohere?
 - b. How does one idea connect to the next?
 - c. Are the connections between ideas made explicit in your writing?
6. Use your outline to do four things:
 - i. See whether each paragraph plays a role in supporting your thesis.
 - ii. What needs to be revised – your thesis? Or the order of the points in your argument?
 - iii. Look for unnecessary repetition of ideas.
 - iv. Compare your reverse outline with your paper to see whether the sentences in each paragraph are related to the main point of that paragraph, per the reverse outline.

COMPARISON BETWEEN MEMORY DRAFT AND REVERSE OUTLINE

Compare the reverse outline to the memory draft. Don't just assume you have a poor memory, but think about the difference between what was recalled and what was actually written. *Discuss:*

- Do you keep the conceptual focus you thought you did in your paper?
- How is the focus different or did you lose focus? Which focus is better?
- Did something come up in your memory draft that is missing from the draft? Should it be included?
- What else is in the draft that wasn't recalled in the memory draft? Is it important to the argument or tangential and distracting?

Having done our reverse outline, perhaps we now have a better idea of which parts of the paper are weakest or most problematic in their connection to the rest of the paper; or, alternatively, what the key cluster of ideas in the paper is. It might now be easier to edit out unnecessary material, clarify paragraphs and their connections to one another (transitions/signposts) and to the thesis. Our next activity will help us with this.

Note—With a little extra time, this activity can be done in peer review form, with students trading papers and reverse outlining each others' work (not necessarily reading each paragraph in detail, perhaps just looking at the first sentence to try to get the main idea), followed by conversation within each pair about the above questions in addition to audience considerations (i.e. did the writer get across to the reader what he or she intended, was the structure sense-making, etc.)

B. Option Two—Memory Draft or First Paragraph Peer Review

For this exercise, have students pair up and trade either the memory draft or the first paragraph of their actual essay. Have them read each others' paragraphs, identify the thesis, and write what they think the rest of the paper of the paper is going to look like (what work they take the paper to be doing, the structure of the main points, etc.). Perhaps they will even be able to sketch a rough outline if the writer provides a strong roadmap. When they have done this (after 7-8 min.) have them converse with their partner about whether the reader's expectations fit well with what the writer actually does in the rest of the paper.

It seems that this exercise can succeed in one of two ways: 1) The reader offers back to the writer something that looks very much like what the writer does in the paper. This means that the writer is on a good track. 2) The reader offers back to the writer something that *does not* look like what the writer does in the paper. This provides an opportunity for reader and writer to discuss what gaps there are in the introduction or in the argument as a whole, and to think about ways in which the paper might need to be refined or restructured.

Have a group conversation for the last portion of this exercise in which you ask students to reflect on which type of success they had, and what insights this exercise led them to.

V. Activity 3 (8 min.)

Now you have the choice to work through one of five revision exercises, whichever is most useful for you now that you have worked through the first activity, which was designed to identify overall things to be worked on in revision.

Note: One exercise might be more appropriate to the assignment or the class than any others. Consult with instructor about whether students should focus on a particular exercise or be given a choice.

*Direct them again to the **Activities Handout**, which has description of each activity and suggestions for when each might be useful.*

Select the activity that seems most helpful for your paper, and take five minutes to give it a try.

1. **Re-outline**—This technique helps with the organization of your paper so that your argument comes across clearly and is well supported.

Working from your reverse outline, and your thesis statement, take a fresh piece of paper and write an outline for how you want your argument to proceed. Or, re-order your note cards, possibly having to eliminate some or create others. Use what you can from your original draft, identify where you need new paragraphs, and what ideas they should contain. Be as detailed as possible: write down the point of the paragraph and the evidence from which you will draw.

2. **3x5 Note Card**— This technique will help you look at a draft on the paragraph-level.

On the reverse side of each note card list the evidence you use to back up your topic sentence. Then, evaluate how each paragraph fits into your thesis statement.

- Are your individual paragraphs internally coherent—i.e. do they have a single main idea?
- Do your reasons or evidence warrant your claims?
- Are you using textual evidence well and appropriately to the assignment?
- Are your paragraphs, and the claims within them, presented in a clear and understandable order?

Note: You will not have time to do this for every paragraph. Do two or three now and the rest on your own.

3. **Unpacking an Idea**—This exercise helps you fill in spots where argumentative support is lacking.

Select a certain paragraph in your essay and try to explain in more detail how the concepts or ideas fit together. Unpack the evidence for your claims by showing how it supports your topic sentence, main idea, or thesis. This technique will help you more deliberately explain the steps in your reasoning and point out where any gaps may have occurred within it. It will help you establish how these reasons, in turn, lead to your conclusions.

4. **Writing Between the Lines**—This technique helps you to be aware of complex concepts and to determine what needs additional explanation.

Add information between sentences and paragraphs to clarify concepts and ideas that need further explanation.

5. **Identifying Critical Questions**—This technique helps you focus on the central points in your paper and determine whether they are adequately explored and explained.

Write down the questions you had in mind when you began this paper. See if you can write a question or a series of questions that summarize the most important ideas in your paper. Once you have the critical questions, you can begin to organize your ideas around potential answers to the question. You can also determine whether or not all of the evidence and argument you provide is in fact relevant to answering your questions.

After students have done these activities for 5 minutes or so, discuss with the class which activities they used, for what reasons, how well they worked, and what they discovered in doing so. Direct them back to their memory drafts for comparison and ask if they think their memory drafts still seem to reflect what they want to do with their papers or if something has changed along the way.

VI. Minute Paper

Distribute the index cards and ask the students to answer (anonymously) one question on each side.

Question 1: What is the most important thing you've learned about revising today?

Question 2: What questions or concerns do you still have regarding revision?

Collect these responses. If time permits, it might be worthwhile to read some or all, especially of Question 1, aloud. And possibly also to invite brief answers to the concerns raised in Question 2, if you decide to read any of those.

VII: FINAL REFLECTION & Wrap-up (2 min.)

Knowing you'll revise, you can relax and speak your mind early in your writing process. Since your words can be changed later, you don't have to worry about writing the perfect first draft.

Revision is continuous, from the moment you start the invention process or the first draft, until the moment you print out the final draft. And even final drafts aren't perfect. Leave a text for a few days, or weeks (or months!), and you'll probably find something you want to revise.