

How to Make Revision Count:

Revising Practices for Graduate Writers

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a kind of disclaimer:

- **No right or wrong way to revise**
- **No one-size fits all approaches**

We all write and work differently. We want to find out what works best for us and, most importantly, develop a working method, a revising practice, that we can use and trust and repeat for all of our writing.

In *theory*, there is no difference
between theory and practice.
In *practice*, there is.

--Yogi Berra

Our aim today:

- To build on your current revising strategies**
- To consider ways to more fully use revision as a part of your overall writing practice**
- To begin to develop a “go-to” approach / method you can use (and repeat) to produce your best work**
- To think about our drafting and revising practices and how they can work together**

Two Questions:

- 1. What makes revision so difficult?**
- 2. What are some strategies / practices you use when you revise? What works for you? (And what doesn't?)**

Let's take a few minutes to jot down your responses.

1. Readers and Feedback:

Needing Feedback

Why do writers NEED readers?

Hearing (and using) Feedback

The critical role of Audience in graduate writing

It can feel risky and scary to share writing-in-progress – so we avoid it

Not all feedback is equal

Practice helps us get more comfortable sharing drafts and benefit from reader feedback

more readers...

Continue to find ways to share work-in-progress

- With professors and advisors
- With peers and classmates
- With Writing Partner or Writing Groups
- With services like the Sweetland Center for Writing: (*a quick promo!*) Graduate Writing Workshop Appointments – 7 hour-long appointments per term
- Seek advice! Actively pursue it as part of your learning

2. Ways to Approach the Work of Revision

Global – Big picture work

Think: form, structure, organization, flow, movement, transitions, coherence, cohesion, and big “A” Argument/Claim – “finding the argument”

Local - Small picture work

Think: vocabulary, word choice, sentences, paragraphs, transitions, emphasis, and small “a” argument/sub-claim

Small Picture work - Local

–Vocabulary/Words

Build a working glossary with key terms/terminology, “good” words, and **verbs** – all kinds, but especially the **active verbs** you see in your readings. (Verbs drive drive good prose! Take note in your disciplines.) Try a good thesaurus to make more precise word choices and add to your glossary. (Plug: Oxford American Writer’s Thesaurus – is organized for writers.)

– Sentences

Read aloud! Listen for rhythms, tendencies, patterns, vary sentence lengths, repetitions, cut clutter, waste words, clarify subjects, locate verbs (syntactic closure), use interruptions, and find/use your emphasis.

–Paragraphs

Pull apart to clarify topic, structure, and purpose – *(show example on screen)*

Consider length, variety, connection to previous and following paragraph, and internal transitions

Big Picture Work - Global

Why it's so hard to “see” big picture

–**Reverse Outlining/ Descriptive outlining** – done after a draft or section – as a way to externalize the structure and movement of your draft

<https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/undergraduates/writing-guides/how-do-i-check-the-structure-of-my-argument.html>

Number paragraphs, list topic and purpose for each paragraph, note transitions breaks, jumps, structure and organization, headings and subheadings, places of emphasis.

–**Map essay draft** – using post-its or white board or paper

Goal is create a visual map of the document, to see the connections and flow, pivots, argument, and the larger coherence of your work. Something you can look at while you are revising.

KEY

Writers work at the EDGES when they are revising!

That means:

- Intros and Conclusions
- Beginnings and Endings of Sections
- Beginnings and Endings of Paragraphs
- Beginnings and Endings of Sentences

(That's why they are often so difficult to write, –especially in early drafts!)

Working “at the edges” means:

Time and Attention in revisions is spent on:

- Finding and using Emphasis – so critical!**
- Making the Implicit Explicit for your audience**
- Guiding your Readers: be a good guide to your audience**

3. Drafting With Revision in Mind: an academic writer's mindset

Why?

- our previous writing experience and practice
- the nature of longer, more extended, complex (and original, aka new) scholarly arguments
- And: We move from 5 to 7 to 10 to 15 to 20 pages, and maybe 40 page chapters...

- Use drafts to find, to layout, to explore**
- Use writing to discover and to learn**
- Don't try to know everything before you can**
- Don't try to make things perfect**

the first time through

What does it mean as writers?

- “Shitty First Drafting” rules apply (Anne Lamott!) Take the pressure off of knowing everything before you do. Use the whole writing process.
- leave the edges in play if you don’t yet know. Mark. Wet Paint.
- more writing in sections (series of connected paragraphs
- more building / construction of our writing projects
- Rewriting whole paragraphs or sections – after you know
- TIME! New timescapes for our writing and work. Time in Revisions

- We know more about our papers/work **AFTER** we have written them! Use that new found awareness, that edge, to your revisions!
- Be the writer/scholar you are at the end of the project – at the Beginning. You will have earned more certainty, clarity, authority, and possession of the argument that you can bring into your revisions
- Bring this confidence and voice into your revisions.
- Find and Use your emphasis!

“Writing is a process of dealing with Not-Knowing, a forcing of what and how.”

–Donald Barthelme

~~Rewriting~~
~~Revise, Revise~~
~~Second Draft~~
~~Final Drafts~~
~~About Revising~~
~~On Revising~~
On Revision

The Only Writing That Counts

William Germano

<https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/O/bo115834535.html>

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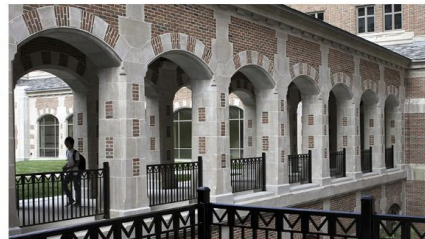
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Question and Answer

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-Sweetland Center for Writing:

<https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/>

-SCW Graduate Students

<https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/graduates.html>