11 Practical Guidelines for Writers and Teachers

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Attitudes take generations to change. Process writing pedagogy and initiatives over the past thirty years have dramatically changed the way we understand how writers write and how people learn to improve their writing. However those ideas have not trickled down to the average person writing a business letter, to professionals, white-collar workers, or to parents and students studying writing. Many continue to believe that writing well means abiding by a set of rules and using good grammar and mechanics. They have limited awareness that rhetorical decisions writers make about purpose, genre, point of view, audience, tone, and style are central to the effectiveness of any piece of writing.

Often when I attend social gatherings of civilians not involved in the writing business, the getting-to-know-you conversation gets around to the fact that I teach writing. Someone invariably intones with an isn't-it-awful smile, " Why don't they teach kids how to spell and write a proper sentence anymore?" or "Nobody teaches students grammar and punctuation." Vestiges of misguided assumptions that writing is solely about content and correctness persist, and they continue to hobble writers. Consequently attitudes about what constitutes good writing, how to teach people to write well, and the role revising plays in the process are themselves in need of revision. The previous chapter outlines best practices that have found acceptance and are used widely and effectively. What has not yet found a central place in writing and writing curricula is commitment to the rhetorical nature of all good writing—the decisions about content, purpose, tone, genre, and style that effective writers make and revisit when they re-

vise. This chapter will first explore the need for change in attitudes about revision, reflecting on dangers in the enterprise; the second portion suggests practical guidelines so writers and writing teachers can build rhetorical considerations into their revising repertoire.

Revision: A Complex, Intuitive, and Elusive Process

The standard perception that revision is something that happens at the end of the writing process is a good place to start revising ideas about revision.

The standard process approach to revision describes it as linear, but recent research confirms that for most writers, revision is very much a recursive, interwoven, intersecting process. In one revising read-through of a text, experienced writers multitask on a ladder of levels, considering deep revision questions of idea, genre, point of view, audience and tone along with the cosmetic editing of surface details. In the same reading writers may eliminate confusion resulting from words, syntax, or punctuation; modify the representation of idea; assess the very validity of the idea; clean up typos and other minute debris littering the text; adjust rhythm and pacing, hunt for grammar slips, replace lame adjectives and verbs, and tweak for tone—all in one reading.

Experienced writers use an intuitive awareness of what needs changing; however even the most articulate and self-aware writers are hard pressed to explain how their brain synapses fire as their fingers tap at the keyboard making changes. Most would need time to figure out their own revising process because it's so internalized and intuitive they do it almost instinctively. Over time, they have developed what Alice S. Horning refers to in her book *Revision Revisited* as "metarhetorical and metalinguistic awarenesses," (8–9) a set of understandings that informs every keystroke of change for experienced writers. Metarhetorical awareness includes the ways writers are conscious, or mostly conscious, of their own ways of writing, of "the strategies, behaviors, techniques, or approaches" that work for them (Horning 8–9). Metarhetorical awareness is shaped by a writer's personality, proclivities, and experiences writing and revising texts. Horning defines metalinguistic awareness as cognizance of language as language (9). The term encompasses a variety of linguistic features of a text and particularly emphasizes how experienced writers achieve readability by listening to the sounds, flow, and patterns of the words.

If writers themselves struggle to explain what it is they do, it's no wonder there are limited texts available to help writers and teachers of writing. Horning's book *Revision Revisited,* Donald Murray's *The Craft of Revision,* and Meredith Sue Willis's *Deep Revision* offer some of the best analyses of what knowledge writers are tapping into as they revise (Horning) and strategies to help writers of all ages revise their work (Murray, Willis).

The Dangers of Practical Strategies

Unpacking the complex understandings that constitute metarhetorical and metalinguistic awareness and unscrambling the spaghetti threads in the multitasking process of revision to offer practical advice is not only challenging, but fraught with dangers. The divide and conquer philosophy—dividing revision into different types of revision (deep or global revision versus surface or final editing) and into different aspects and strategies seems the only way to see the process with clarity and communicate revising moves to those who would like to do it better. Yet there are dangers in the enterprise. Dividing something complex, with overlapping interdependent aspects into discrete, seemingly autonomous elements for the sake of understanding runs the risk that each element will be understood as actually discrete and separate. Like Humpty Dumpty, the whole of the complicated, interconnecting puzzle may be difficult to put together again. The nature of revision is recursive—not linear—yet when we suggest ways to go about revising, we break down the process into its elements and speak of those elements in sequence. We model the process as if it were linear—a conundrum when we say one thing and do another.

The second danger, akin to the first, is that dividing and structuring the complex revision process to make it easier to understand and implement—to simplify it by looking at the threads of revision one at a time—runs the risk of watering down the process, of making it simplistic, even formulaic. Revision is more than a matter of completing a checklist or following ten sure-fire steps to success. It's a creative process, even a mysterious process—which leads to the third danger, misrepresenting its true nature.

Revision's Secret Identity

Revision suffers from the reputation of being tedious and mechanical, yet Donald Murray insists it's a creative and sometimes inspired

process. In an effort to get students to edit at all, then to do it carefully and well, many teachers emphasize that it's hard, necessary work. However, revising can be much more. Bolts of inspiration occasionally come as we revise. More commonly, quiet satisfaction settles upon us as we till fields of words. Sometimes the words we write reveal truths we didn't know we knew; language can create knowledge; revision can facilitate discovery. This business of revising can be revelatory, inspiring, and deeply satisfying. Yet we who have experienced deep satisfaction or moments of inspiration usually keep those experiences to ourselves, sharing only with the initiated and then only sometimes. Would we be exposing ourselves so much if we at least hinted that revision is not always onerous work, that it can be creative and occasionally even exciting? Donald Murray thinks not.

Murray's loose-jointed, experimental (try this and see what it reveals) approach to revision emphasizes its creative possibilities. If more writers regarded revision as creative work with the possibility of surprise (Wherever did that idea come from?) and inspiration (Let's put this with that . . . voila, it works), they'd approach revision with less dread and more anticipation. To be creative, however, revision needs time and freedom from excessive constraint and regimentation. It needs to remain open and loose and walk on the edge of possibilities, trying them on and checking them out. This chapter proposes some practical guidelines to help writers revise. The challenge is to keep the spark of creativity alive in revision, to fan its feeble flame so writers experience revision as possibility, maybe even as an interesting and inspiring part of writing.

The Fallacy of the Natural Writer

Students often divide the world into two kinds of people: those who write well and those, who, like themselves, struggle to get ideas on a page and are "not good at writing." They assume that writing comes easily to publishing writers, writing teachers, journalists, and others naturally facile with language, that such natural writers compose with clarity and grace, that words flow and ideas spring fully formed onto the page. Such assumptions grossly exaggerate the truth that some people *are* more verbal than others. Writing well, however, is a learned skill for everybody, and all writers are lucky if words occasionally come easily and ideas flow well. The truth is writing is a struggle. It's dif-

ficult to get a piece started, to find a focus; it's a challenge to grow an idea, flesh it out, give it life. Even knowing when to end and how to end are difficult. But students are reluctant to give up their tidy division of the world into those who write naturally and those who are "not good at it" because it's a convenient explanation for their lack of success. Lack of commitment, lack of persistence, and a reluctance to revise multiple times are more valid explanations for unsuccessful writing than lack of natural ability.

Professional writer Anne Lamott's pithy essay "Shitty First Drafts" gets students laughing at her candid vocabulary and persuades them that professional writers really do turn out lousy writing, just as students do, and that all writers struggle. This excerpt gives the flavor of her argument.

> Now, practically even better news than that of short assignments is the idea of shitty first drafts. All good writers write them. This is how they end up with good second drafts and terrific third drafts. People tend to look at successful writers, writers who are getting their books published and maybe even doing well financially, and think that they sit down at their desks every morning feeling like a million dollars, feeling great about who they are and how much talent they have and what a great story they have to tell; that they take in a few deep breaths, push back their sleeves, roll their necks a few times to get all the cricks out, and dive in, typing fully formed passages as fast as a court reporter. But that is just the fantasy of the uninitiated. I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down routinely feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident. Not one of them writes elegant first drafts. [. . .]
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> Very few writers really know what they are doing until they've done it. Nor do they go about their business feeling dewy and thrilled. They do not type a few stiff warm-up sentences and then find themselves bounding along like huskies across the snow [. . .] We all often feel like we are pulling teeth, even those writers whose prose ends up being the most natural

and fluid. The right words and sentences just do not come pouring out like ticker tape most of the time. [. . .]

For me and most of the writers I know, writing is not rapturous. In fact, the only way I can get anything written at all is to write really, really shitty first drafts.

Lamott's essay provides a rationale for using focused free writes to tap into recesses of the mind where ideas may be fermenting. It encourages writers to stop agonizing and just write a draft. Once they begin, the writing can beget ideas. Writing can help us discover what we want to say, loosen up our verbal muscles, get the words flowing. Lamott's freewheeling essay assures us that even accomplished writers write lame beginnings, garbage middles, and fatuous endings. They sometimes write shitty first drafts. And that's no reason to despair because a draft is a beginning that allows writers to discover what needs to happen next.

Once we've dispelled the fallacy of the natural writer, apprentice writers need to clarify the difference between deep revision and final editing.

The Difference between Deep Revision and Final Editing

Inexperienced writers entertain a host of misconceptions about revision. The most persistent is the belief that revising a piece is the same as final editing. Students have learned to hunt for spelling errors and homonyms, fix grammar mistakes, and repair punctuation problems. They're content to fix errors, put in a few paragraph indentions, root out run-on sentences and consider a paper revised. Unless writing teachers define error fixing as surface editing and differentiate that from what Meredith Sue Willis calls "deep revision," surface editing is what they'll get, because that's the widespread understanding of what it means to revise.

Editing holds an important place in the revision process, no mistake; it's essential to clean up a piece of writing to avoid the irritations and interruptions errors cause, to clean it up so readers notice its deeper merits. But surface editing is not deep revision, and dispelling the misconception that they're more or less the same is a necessary

first step in persuading students that surface editing, even when it's meticulously carried out and successful at presenting a piece of writing with a clean shining face, is not enough to solve deeper problems. The ants-at-a-picnic metaphor may help put into perspective the ways editing and revision differ.

The Ants-at-a-Picnic Metaphor

Most people would agree that a picturesque setting, a beautiful day, convivial company, and good food are essentials for a successful and memorable picnic and that ants, when they arrive on the scene, are merely nuisances. Problems with mechanics like grammar, punctuation, and capitalization are similar to the nuisance ants cause at a picnic. A few errors won't spoil a fine piece of writing, but numerous pesky errors, like numerous pesky insects at a picnic, can ruin a perfectly wonderful paper.

A lack of errors, however, doesn't mean a paper is wonderful. This is the piece students often don't understand. The essentials are, just that, essential for success. Capitalization, spelling, grammar, and punctuation facilitate our enjoyment of the essentials. Deep revision deals with the essentials of good writing like choosing a genre and point of view that suit the situation and purpose of a piece of writing; having a clever, fresh idea or a mesmerizing tale to tell; considering readers' expectations, knowledge and opinions, and getting the tone right. Editing is akin to pest control—clearing the piece of bothersome bugs. Making the distinction between deep revision and surface editing is the first step in persuading writers to spend time doing deep revision. Before we can take that step, however, those of us who teach writing need to reform our own tendency to emphasize mechanics over other considerations, or at least reform those practices that lead students to believe mechanics—more than anything else—determines the grades they receive and our evaluation of their writing. Once we've gotten students in the habit of doing no fault writing in the form of focused free writes and shitty first drafts that no one else will see, it's time to break our own misleading habits.

Students often believe that teachers care more about mechanics than they care about content, style, and rhetorical decisions (if they even know what rhetorical decisions might be), because most written comments on papers focus on mechanics far more than on all other

considerations. Both teachers and peers can benefit from revising the ways they provide feedback to include a more comprehensive response to a piece of writing that clearly focuses on rhetorical considerations.

Breaking Old Habits: Colorizing Comments

One way to break old habits and get our own practices out into the open is to colorize them. Using different colored pens or pencils for four types of comments makes colorfully obvious whether or not our comments strike a reasonable balance. Writing multicolored notations on papers also gives teachers an incentive to avoid a monochromatic emphasis on mechanics and to expand comments to other considerations, to broaden the palette. Teachers might ask questions about logic and content and indicate places where the paper needs transitions in red. They might name the tone and wonder whether that tone might be too outspoken or barbed to appeal to the paper's audience in green, and underline repetitious sentence structures and excessive state of being verbs in pink. Finally they could note problems with mechanics in blue. The colored comments suggest a plan for revision so students can use the divide and conquer strategy, perhaps dealing first with red issues (content, idea, organization), then exploring green issues (rhetorical decisions, tone, and audience) followed by pink (style and voice), and finally getting to blue (mechanics). Whether teachers use colorized comments, standard proofreading symbols, or smiley faces and exclamation points, some of the comments need to encourage, support, and praise successful language choices and interesting ideas.

Including Good News with the Bad

All writers hunger for appreciation—all writers, no exceptions. As cheerful as rainbow coded papers may look, or as efficient as proofreading symbols may be, notations can be devastating if nearly all comments point to problems, difficulties, inadequacies, and work yet to be done. Writers need to know that despite problems with a piece, they did write something good—something genuinely good. Whether teachers comment on a lovely turn of phrase, a thoughtful idea, a witty image, or a vivid description doesn't matter. What *does* matter is that at least some feedback be positive. "I like the way you. . . . , good point! Vivid verb choice, or I laughed out loud." Praise brings solace to stu-

dents' fragile and often wounded perceptions of themselves as writers. It gives them something to cling to and be proud of and build upon. A bit of praise and public recognition before the class enables students to sustain hope that the paper, despite its problems, has qualities worth developing.

General pat-on-the-back comments such as "Good Job" or "Well Done" written at the end of the paper may warm writers' egos briefly, but they don't make clear *what* is working in their draft that caused you to approve, or smile, or respond. Why else do writers ask others to read their drafts but to take the piece out of their own heads and see how it fares in the world of readers? Writers need specific comments from readers—their friends and peers in writing groups and workshops. Carol Trupiano offers advice on writing workshops in the previous chapter, Best Practices.

Writers also nervously wait to hear what their teacher will say. Teachers can provide the most useful feedback when they react as just another reader, albeit an experienced one. Offer comments not as final arbiter, not as the only reader who counts because you give the grade, but as an attentive, interested reader willing to go into detail about what you liked and responded to and what caused you difficulty or confusion.

Often writers don't understand what they've written until a reader gives it a name. If a reader says, "I like the sarcastic edge here. It gives the paper personality," the writers may say to themselves, "So that's what I was doing, being sarcastic." That's information about how readers perceive the paper. Information is what writers need. Certainly they love praise in any form, but specific praise that provides information is much more valuable when writers decide what to keep, what to cut, and what to change.

Building Time into the Process

Process writing changed the way most teachers help students develop a paper. It built time into the process: idea generation activities (free writing, mapping, listing) followed by first drafts read in peer workshops, conferences with the teacher, then final editing. Process writing builds in multiple times for writers to revisit and re-envision a paper and to see it from the perspective of different readers.

Donald Murray advises writers to get the paper out of their heads. Peer workshops effectively distance writers from the writing on several levels. First, even during the cerebral activity of composing alone, writers envision an audience of peers reading the paper in a workshop. That envisioning discourages self-centered journal writing and encourages writers to relate to an imagined audience, to explain thoroughly, to define, and include transitions. Then in the actual workshop, writers hear from real readers. The comments of real readers affirm that the paper has a life of its own, speaks for itself, and may even say things the writers had not intended or planned. That sense of the paper as a separate entity is an awareness writers need in order to revise, but it can't happen during the intense, symbiotic relationship most writers have with a paper when it's newborn.

So a second value that comes from building time into the process is the objectivity that happens when papers have time to develop a life of their own apart from the writers. When papers are newborn, they are the product of toil and genius. They *are* the writers and have no independent life of their own. To criticize writers' newborn papers is to criticize the writers. Time remedies this state of temporary insanity. Letting a paper rest a day or so miraculously brings increased perspective and, for most writers, the ability to hear comments. Consequently, building time into the revision process is one of the most significant contributions of process writing pedagogy.

If It's Not a Draft, It's a Revision

The language of process pedagogy refers to *developing* a paper, but *revision* is what's actually taking place. Once writers commit their ideas to the page, all reassessments and adjustments that take place on the way to the final version are essentially revisions. Every stage in the process offers not only opportunities to revise, but expectations that writers will analyze what they've done, experiment with different options, and make changes as a piece develops.

Teachers can extend the process further by offering students the opportunity to revise a piece once or twice, even after it's been graded or after it is officially in the student's portfolio. The carrot, of course, that persuades many students to work on the paper yet again is the possibility of getting a better grade. Teachers hope students feel a sense of accomplishment and pride in their own abilities, and that they hone

their own metarhetorical and metalinguistic skills as a result of revision. Teachers should make clear that a clean-up-errors kind of edit will raise the grade only slightly, but a full-fledged revision may result in a significant change in the grade. With this clear distinction, teachers reinforce the difference between surface editing and deep revision. Asking students to include their own editorial assessments with the revision packet (containing the revised paper and drafts) puts the revision ball in their court. They must reflect, in writing, what they thought needed attention, how they came to be aware of a problem (Was it their own intuition? A peer's comment? Reading the paper aloud?). Then they explain what they decided to do to resolve the problem and why they made those decisions. Requiring them to reflect on their own decisions helps them develop awareness of genre, audience, tone, and style and encourages deep revision rather than surface editing.

Risk-Free Revision

If we would encourage students to do deep revision and to experiment when they look at their options for changing a paper, we must acknowledge that the trajectory of revision is not onward and upward in a linear path to paper perfection. Sometimes writers make confusing changes, take detours and bog down in quagmires, change a meek tone to be more assertive and come across as obnoxious and pushy. With the best of intentions, all writers make bad choices from time to time. If we want students to feel they can be adventurous when they revise, that they can try something they've never done before or depart from formulas and conventional protocol, revision must be risk free. We must promise students that even a revision that is worse than the original will never receive a lower grade. If revising a paper creates new problems, comment on those problems, but avoid punishing a student for making a genuine effort. Students who venture into deep revision waters deserve praise for their bravery and for their willingness to experiment even if that experiment moves a paper backward rather than forward. Any scientist will confirm that an experiment that proves the hypothesis false is not a failure because it provides information about what doesn't work. So it is also with revision.

Divide and Conquer—Clusters of Consideration

Once rhetorical decisions take the spotlight, teachers and writers need specific strategies. One such strategy to encourage deep revision and show mechanics as subsidiary to rhetorical decisions is to divide revision into four distinct processes or considerations to be addressed separately. Colorizing comments on papers, as described previously, offers one way to launch a four-part analysis that can be implemented in peer workshops, through individual exercises related to the focus, and in conferences with the teacher. Students might work on a paper four different times between the first draft and the final version, focusing each time on one of the four clusters of consideration below:

- Content
- Rhetorical Decisions
- Style
- Mechanics

Content: Argument, Logic, Narrative, Organization

Having something worthwhile to say is a prerequisite for a worthy piece of writing. There's no point in polishing a piece that has structural flaws, that will need to be pulled apart and re-built because the materials are defective or the blueprint is faulty. So content/substance is a good place to begin revising.

Admittedly substance and style are irrevocably intertwined, and substance without style is as unpalatable as style without substance. A piece that's woefully lacking in style may come off as plodding and dull, as lifeless and boring. Nevertheless, if the idea has merit and warrants exploration—even if it's still but a seed, or if the story taps into something essentially human and true, then the writing, however sketchy and undeveloped, however graceless and raw, contains the necessary potential to become something worthy. So focusing first on content makes sense despite the reality that style usually gets noticed first and is more seductive.

The vocabulary of marketing illustrates the way readers respond to the interplay between content and style. Content is product (its design, function, value, and ability to meet a felt need). Style is marketing (advertising, pricing, promotion, distribution). Razzle dazzle marketing can seduce the public into buying a product—for a while, but if

the product doesn't work well or is poorly designed, that product will soon lose market share to better mousetraps. Engaging style (clever, witty, graceful, articulate) can seduce readers into trusting writers' ideas—for a while, but if the logic, argument, or plot contain flaws or misrepresentations, that piece of writing will eventually lose readers' allegiance. It's a matter of trust. Only substantive content, developed with integrity and responsibility, warrants trust. So the first focus in a workshop or conference would do well to look at content.

To help writers revise the content of a draft, simply ask them to articulate their main argument, their main line of reasoning, so they can see more clearly the bones on which the paper is built (or should be built). When they speak aloud or express in writing what they want to communicate (one or two sentence limit), the activity helps them realize the thrust and shape of their own argument.

The explain-while-standing-on-one-foot strategy also accomplishes a distillation and clarification of argument that helps students cut through fluff and digression to realize their core message. Writers are asked to express their main argument while standing on one foot. This standing on one foot can be actual or figurative, but it remains a catchy way to facilitate focus and avoid digression. Most people are not adept at standing on one foot for any length of time without teetering, wobbling, and feeling foolish; consequently, the absurd challenge to declare the point of their essay while standing on one foot necessitates focus, decisiveness, directness, and brevity.

Outlines offer another strategy to help writers discover the structure and development of their argument. When they outline their own essay or list the claims they've made, they see that argument more clearly and can fill out and tighten up the reasoning in the next round of revision.

Whether a piece of writing presents an argument, a personal narrative, or a fictional story, whether it compares and contrasts, defines or describes, there are numerous text books and readers that model and discuss developing content, idea, and argument. There are, however, far fewer books to help writers explore their rhetorical options. Rhetorical decisions are too often absent from writing curricula or are given short shrift. They deserve a central place in any discussion of how writing conveys ideas.

Once the idea/content has received attention as the first area of consideration, it's time to move on to the rhetorical decisions writers

make, not just when they're drafting, but as part of reassessing those decisions during revision.

Rhetorical Decisions: Purpose, Genre, Audience, Tone, and Point of View

Those who write professionally make rhetorical decisions based on in-tuited awareness developed over years of experience. Less experienced writers are seldom aware that they even make such decisions. Helping them focus on rhetorical decisions gives them options as writers and gives them the language to describe how writing works.

> *Purpose:* Deciding what purpose the writers hope to accomplish is a wise first rhetorical decision. Do writers wish to inform, persuade, entertain, appeal to readers emotionally, move readers to action, or ac-complish some combination of these purposes? Once writers decide what their intentions are, they can move on to deciding the genre that best suits their purposes.

> *Genre:* Usually genre is decided by the teacher and specified in the assignment, "Write a theme that pres-ents an argument," or "Write a personal memoir re-counting a significant event that happened when you were ten or eleven years old." Consequently, few in-experienced writers are aware they have choices about form. For starters, teachers can introduce the French term, genre, that has crossed over into English usage to mean type or kind of writing and is used to name standard categories that texts fall into. Because many writers have little experience seeing how form affects the ways readers perceive a piece of writing, genre is virgin territory for many of them.

To help writers focus on genre, teachers can try any one or combi-nation of the following three assignments.

1. Present a topic for writing without indicating what form it is to take, in fact make it clear that choosing the genre is up to the writers. The writers can decide whether to write an academic theme, a letter to the editor, a short story, a personal memoir,

even a poem. Students can discuss what messages these forms convey to readers, what readers expect from given forms, and which form best suits the situation and the writers' purpose(s) and message.

2. The teacher could tell students that all of them in class will write about the same idea/issue/event, but they are to write about it in different (assigned or chosen) genres. Once the short papers are drafted, the class can compare how genre affects what readers expected of the piece because of its form and how the genre itself shaped the message.

3. Students could write a paper in a genre of their choice, then rewrite the paper on the same subject in a different genre—academic essay and personal narrative for instance. To reinforce the focus on genre, a good follow up exercise asks students to write an analysis of the ways form changed their emphasis or content or changed the way readers perceive their message.

Asking how form affects *readers* leads to the importance of knowing the audience, not just knowing generally in the abstract, but in particular and in detail.

> *Audience:* The more precisely writers understand those who will read a piece, the better writers can get their attention, make them laugh or cry or change viewpoints or behavior. The following visualization exercise gets writers to fine tune their thinking about audience, borrowing from exercises fiction writers use to get to know their characters.

Visualizing Henrietta

> Situation: You are writing a letter to Mrs. Henrietta Schollenberger (or whatever other fanciful name strikes students' fancy) to inform her that she was not accepted for (fill in the blank here). Students can visualize Henrietta in detail—and most importantly—imagine how she will feel when she receives the rejection letter. The exercise encourages writ-

ers to know their readers in particular rather than
in the abstract and to visualize and anticipate how
readers will respond to the message. Awareness of
the audience leads writers to ask the following ques-
tions: What can writers assume readers know and
what might writers be wise to explain? What ideas
are readers likely to resist and what will they probably
embrace? What tone will most likely help achieve the
purpose with this particular audience?

Another means to encourage writers to focus on audience is to ask
students to write adjectives to describe how readers will likely react
to the message of the piece. Will readers feel angry, upset, pleased,
argumentative, amused, disappointed, worried? Knowing and nam-
ing what feelings a piece of writing will likely elicit in readers em-
power writers to develop a strategy that intensifies or ameliorates those
feelings, that uses awareness of audience to accomplish the purpose.
When writers ask themselves "How do I want to come across to read-
ers?" they're getting at tone.

> *Tone:* Students refer to tone of voice and attitude
> when describing how speakers are perceived by those
> who hear them. Tone prevails in written language
> too; sometimes it's neutral or mild and sometimes it
> bristles with attitude. Teachers can help students no-
> tice tone by first asking them to name it in texts they
> read, to find words to describe this attitude.

Next students can declare the tone they intend as a prerequisite
for drafting a piece. What adjectives would they like readers to use to
describe their text? Would they like to come across as outspoken, well
informed, sarcastic, playful, thoughtful, sincere, impassioned, com-
mitted? Having to articulate the tone they're aiming for and that suits
the situation and purpose helps writers keep focused as they write.

> *Point of View:* Students often assume that point of
> view is determined by genre, that essays are always
> written in third person and personal narratives are
> naturally written in first person. The emerging popu-
> larity of new and hybrid genres like the personal nar-

rative essay and creative non fiction have reinstated point of view as a variant of choice. Experimenting with the implications and shadings of meaning that point of view brings to writing opens up possibilities that few inexperienced writers have thought much about.

Implications of Point of View

The *first person point of view,* the pronoun "I" brings a sense of immediacy to the action and feels more personal and candid.

The *third person point of view* backs away from the action or idea and lends perspective and a presumption of objectivity. Students can decide whether they want to be "up close and personal" hence first person, or to back away from events and see with the wide-angle lens of third person point of view. They enjoy contemplating the powers of *third person omniscient point of view* where a godlike observer sees everywhere at once and even sees into characters' minds.

The *second person point of view* pronoun "you" with its finger pointing connotations has a deserved home in directions and step-by-step descriptions. "First you align tab A with slot 1." "You," however, has become the pronoun of choice in casual conversation and creeps regularly into student writings. "*You* know how you feel," students say when they don't really mean you the reader, but themselves. In its easygoing, lazy way, the "generic you," is a convenient pronoun used as if it fits any situation. Unfortunately, it is replacing more exacting pronouns. Some teachers ban the generic you from student writing except in directions, in the most informal writing situations, and in dialogue. The pronoun "you" can also put people on the defensive with its implied finger pointing accusation. It can create division—"you people" as outsiders, unaccepted and unacceptable. The pronoun "we,"

on the other hand, brings people together, suggests
unity, cooperation, and shared destiny.

Since show is better than tell, the following exercises encourage stu-
dents to realize for themselves the difference point of view can make.

1. Write about an event in first person point of view; then write
   about the very same event in third person point of view. In what
   ways does the point of view change things?

2. Give advice to someone about how to look better, write better, or
   drive better using the pronoun "you." Then give the same advice
   using "we." Discuss whether readers would likely respond differ-
   ently to the same advice written from the two points of view?

Style

Good style is often so inconspicuous that readers are unaware of it. It
expresses ideas clearly, makes descriptions come alive, energizes the ac-
tion, and keeps a piece moving. It allows words to strut and dance and
enjoy themselves, rather than plod along doing their duty. Problems
with style include a host of language practices that are not exactly
incorrect, but nevertheless mire a piece of writing in mediocrity. Style
problems include redundancies and wordiness; choppy sentences,
repetitious sentence beginnings, limited sentence variety; too many
state of being verbs, imprecise verbs, excessive use of passive voice, and
general bland descriptions to name a few. Many students in college
writing classes report that no teacher in their twelve years of previous
schooling ever explicitly addressed issues of style. Yet writing that lacks
style can never be truly good. Style can quietly exude the inconspicu-
ous competence of clear, well written prose, or it can play with words
and images more ostentatiously. Because style is so integral to the way
readers perceive a piece of writing, it deserves serious attention, espe-
cially during revision. Numerous handbooks on writing effectively ad-
dress the issues listed above, so teachers have many resources to draw
on.

What handbooks don't stress enough is that style problems are best
diagnosed by ear, because style, after all, is the music of language.
When students make it a practice to *read their own writing aloud* and
trust their own sense of what sounds good and what sounds slightly
off key, they become increasingly able to hear problems of style. Ex-

perienced writers hear words in their heads, in their mind's ear. Inexperienced writers need practice listening for style in written language. To develop students' sense of language as music and their ability to discern good style from mediocre, teachers can try the following exercises:

1. Ask students to *Read aloud* and discuss passages from texts (by published writers and by the students themselves). Choose texts that would cause stylists to smile inwardly at the pleasing rhythm and flow of words, the symmetry and parallelism of phrases and clauses, the aptness of word choices, the exuberance of verbs. Ask students to discuss what they liked and responded to in the passage and what made it good style.

2. Ask students to revise a weak passage with one or two specific style difficulties such as general adjectives rather than concrete, specific adjectives, or generic, bland verbs rather than vivid, action verbs, or short choppy sentences. First someone *reads the passage aloud* allowing students to diagnose the problem by ear; then the teacher passes out a text version of the passage or displays the text on an overhead projector so students (alone or in pairs) can revise the passage by replacing nondescript adjectives with vivid ones; replacing bland verbs with specific, active ones; combining choppy sentences for a more mature, graceful style.

3. Require students as an experiment to *read their own writing aloud* in three different ways and record in a journal what the writing-by-ear experiments revealed.

    a. In quiet and solitude, students can *read the paper aloud* to the walls. Ask them to trust their impressions and to ask, "What do your ears like? What troubles you, just doesn't get off the ground, but merely skitters along. Ask students to *read the paper aloud* to an attentive listener. In this exercise, the listener's comments are only part of the pay off. More important is how students transpose their ears into another and hear their own writing from the perspective of the listener.

    b. Ask students to have someone else *read their papers aloud* to them. When they read their own work, they're likely to read what they meant to say or what they thought they said.

Another reader will read what's actually on the page. The dissonance between what they meant to say and what's actually on the page can alert them to places where the style needs adjustment. When readers stumble over words or visually struggle to follow meaning, those clues can help writers identify places where language is obstructing the idea rather than supporting it.

These exercises focus on hearing what's amiss with style. Style also includes adding flourishes and grace notes of language to the bones of an idea to flesh it out and give it depth and vitality. Metaphors (both short and extended), similes, and stylistic repetition are three stylistic additions that many inexperienced writers have never themselves tried to write. In the interest of experimenting and trying out possibilities, a class can read aloud Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech so they hear the techniques at work in his language. King relies extensively on metaphors in the speech and uses deliberate stylistic repetition effectively when he says "I have a dream" and "One hundred years ago [. . .]" Once students have heard and identified fine examples of figurative language and stylistic repetition, they can try writing their own. Everyone, even the teacher, can try writing a metaphor and try stylistic repetition (the phrase they choose should be repeated at least three times). Then everyone shares attempts with the class. Some students will write feeble first tries, but others' attempts will have real possibilities and everyone will hear language taking flight in those few attempts that work well. They'll hear the possibilities and realize that figurative language and stylistic repetition are techniques within reach of ordinary writers like themselves.

Voice

Donald Murray says "voice is the quality in writing, more than any other, that makes the reader read on" (65). The terms style, voice, persona, and tone all refer from slightly different angles to the idea of personality that comes through in the writing. The four terms nibble around the central idea of the mind behind the words, the word view of the person that readers know through the text. Spending time with an interesting mind and seeing the world the way writers see it are what engage readers. We've all read texts with scintillating ideas that nevertheless droned on endlessly because writers had no presence in

them. We've also read texts on superfluous, overworked topics that nevertheless leapt off the page and made us care, pulled us off the sidelines because the writer was there on the page. Whether friend or adversary, writers with a distinctive voice are people readers can not easily ignore.

Yet many writers, particularly student writers, seldom let their individual voices speak out in their writing. They often write flat, generic, formal prose, thinking that's what the assignment calls for and what the teacher expects. It takes courage for writers to reveal themselves; it's dangerous to expose our foibles, foolishness, convictions, and passions for others to read. Writers don't do it lightly. Yet readers love and respect most those writers with the courage, daring, and generosity of spirit to share their ideas and experiences with readers, to be present in what they write.

Those who teach writing can foster voice in students' writing in several ways:

1. Include assignments in the curriculum in addition to the academic essay with its typically disengaged style. Letters to the editor, journalistic columns, personal narrative essays, and creative non fiction are genres that invite writers to be more present and engaged. Teachers can open up the essay and invite students to dispense with protocols they find cumbersome and to experiment with other forms or combinations of forms. They can read Montaigne and see how the father of the modern essay wrote loose-jointed, free flowing investigations of ideas that were a far cry from the lockstep format that now characterizes the academic essay.

2. Teachers can make the writing classroom a safe place where students' egos will not be bruised by harsh criticism from the teacher or from classmates because by class decree, critiques must be gentle, diplomatic, and constructive. The classroom should be a place that fosters experimenting with possibilities and a place where earnest effort receives support and encouragement. Teachers themselves can do the assignments they give students (some in-class assignments at least) and read their own efforts to the class, not to show superiority, but to show that the teacher's writing is not always wonderful, that all writers struggle to get it right, and that everyone in a community of writers should be willing to take chances and experiment—teachers included.

Mechanics

Dozens of excellent writing handbooks and grammar books teach how to fix errors that typically appear in the work of inexperienced writers. Researchers in writing pedagogy continue to debate whether noting problems on student papers is the most effective way to help students learn, whether teachers should notate at all, and if they do, in what detail. Scholars question whether teachers should even bother to instruct students about language patterns that are fast becoming standard usage (lay taking over for lie, disagreement of pronoun and antecedent, i.e. We should judge *a person* by who *they* are). The verdict is not yet in about which teaching practices result in the most improvement in student writing.

Nevertheless, we who teach writing can expand understanding of revision as more than error fixing and final editing. Teachers can model that repairing errors is not, and should not be, the most important part of revision. To model that deep revision is as important as final editing, teachers can focus on the other three clusters of consideration: content, rhetorical decisions, and style (in any order that suits). The clusters of consideration develop students' awareness and expand their understanding of what choices they have as writers.

This Much We Know Is True— Writing Teachers Who Write

What is clear is that teachers who themselves write and revise are in closer touch with the frustrations and insecurities writers grapple with and in a better position to speak about revision in practical ways that are helpful to inexperienced writers. If we wish to revise perceptions of what constitutes good writing, good revision, and good teaching, we must emphasize the critical importance of rhetorical considerations— purpose, genre, point of view, tone, voice, audience, and style—and make them part of the repertoire for all writers.

Writers need multiple times to revisit a piece with time off between revision sessions, because good revisions happen over time. One peer workshop between the first draft and the final version may not be enough time to practice deep revision. That one workshop can too easily revert to a hunt for errors at the expense of addressing deep revision issues such as assessing the development and validity of the idea and weighing the effectiveness of writers' rhetorical decisions. Teach-

ers who schedule several weeks to develop and revise a paper enable writers to see their papers more objectively, experiment with their options, and practice deep revision.

When writers reflect (and write down those reflections) on their own choices as writers, they develop the metalinguistic and metarhetorical awareness that professional writers employ when they revise. As less experienced writers become aware of their choices and grasp the interplay of decisions they make, they can depart from the artificial practice of looking at one issue at a time in sequence. Then revision can revert to its true nature as a recursive process happening on many levels at once, a process that is sometimes surprising and revelatory, and consistently challenging and interesting.