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INTRODUCTION

Though one still finds too few texts which treat revision as more than polishing a draft for clarity and correctness, the term revision has undergone a redefinition among many teachers: no longer the province, exclusively or primarily, of style or arrangement, it is viewed as the means and sometimes the substance of invention. All of the essays in this issue work from this broadened definition of revision.

We begin with an interview with a professional writer, Calvin Trillin, reporter, novelist, essayist. Trillin's discussion of his writing process corroborates what we now know to be typical of mature writers: they mull longer, easily tolerate suspensions of closure, make use of a variety of writing and revision strategies adaptable to different kinds of writing and the problems of a particular topic, work with large chunks of prose. Re-seeing permeates every aspect of composing for the mature writer, from changing the "lead"—whether only a way to begin or the focus or central point—to imposing a better order of parts to sharpening the diction of sentences.

Ann Berthoff presents the philosophical grounds of her belief that writing and thinking are radically alike. Both have forming—making meaning, the cognitive processes of recognition and representation—at the center. Revision is not, she emphasizes, so much achieving a mechanically correct or rhetorically artful layout of what one already knows one knows as discovering that one knows what one knows (and does not know and perhaps cannot know) and how one knows it. Then and only then can form follow form. Students are encouraged to see the radical similarity of writing and thinking, she believes, when they keep dialectical notebooks and lecture notes, gloss their own paragraphs, interpretively paraphrase their own prose sentence by sentence, and when they prepare close imitations of structurally distinctive passages.

As Donald Murray puts it, "The writer's meaning rarely arrives by room-service, all neatly laid out on the tray." Instead, it is discovered and clarified in the act of writing, sentence by sentence, as the writer assesses whether he can "accept, document, and communicate" the meaning of the sentence he just wrote. Murray recommends teaching strategies which

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recognize the centrality, in writing, of the student's struggle toward meaning. Thus he urges teachers *not* to supply their own well-articulated interpretations of what the student meant to say: that the instructor frequently model the process of writing by composing and revising extemporaneously for the class; that writing classes be run as workshops with additional individual conferences; that each workshop devise its own checklist of principles and procedures for revision based on the concrete examples shared as a class.

The essays by Nancy Sommers and Thomas Newkirk explore the kinds of writing students produce when, instead of probing their beliefs and ideas or experiences about a subject, they become preoccupied with following rules which have been abstracted from the contexts which gave them meaning. Whether these rules govern structure or style, whether they are derived from textbooks, teachers, or even the student's experience with one kind of writing as opposed to others, attempting to follow the rules may displace a search for substance as the center of the writing process. Ironically, of course, the student then has no criterion for deciding which of two contradictory rules to follow. He cannot know, for example, whether to "add relevant details" or whether to "cut unnecessary words" without reference to the controlling idea to which they are relevant or necessary. Both authors urge teachers to seek out the ways students may misconstrue and misapply rules.

Several of our authors remind us that one skill that distinguishes mature writers is their ability to imagine and to address an audience. Linda Flower summarizes her work on the differences between writer-based and reader-based prose, and suggests three teaching strategies which will help students write for readers: setting assignments which have specific and realistic audiences; having students formulate a goal for writing which addresses the interests and needs of that audience; and having students role-play a questioning, challenging reader. David Rankin suggests that writing successive drafts for specific, increasingly difficult audiences puts writing for the audience at the center of instruction in a way that enables students to move toward competence in stages compatible with the composing process. And, based upon her survey of the research in reading and auding skills, Irene Clark suggests that role-playing the audience is likely to be more effective, at least initially, when basic writers "listen for comprehension" (that is, for thesis and points of support) than when they read silently, for they are more skillful as listeners than readers and more easily perceive the effects of disorganization and incoherence.

David Hoddeson maintains that oral/aural states remain essential and integral to the writing process, however unpracticed or professional—that writing invariably reflects the evidence of the writer talking to himself and hearing his own voice. The striking similarities between transcribed speech as it occurs in conversation and the writing of basic writers suggests that teaching strategies should mediate quite consciously between the oral/aural and writing selves and the structural differences between voice and text. These methods include oral reading, oral dictation, editing written transcriptions of raw tapes of conversations into written texts, and comparing actual conversations with artistic representations of them.

Our last essay by Susan Wall and Anthony Petrosky presents self-reports of revision practices from writers at five instructional levels, from students who need remediation in both reading and writing to students skilled enough to have been placed in advanced general writing. Because the survey covers five instructional levels during a single semester rather than a cohort of students moving through five instructional levels, it is impossible to tell exactly how the college curriculum may shape student attitudes and which teaching methods may be most effective in developing skills without inadvertently or unnecessarily developing negative attitudes and practices: students arrive with many of their attitudes, practices, and skills in place as a result of prior instruction (or the lack of it). Even so, the profile of student development is quite encouraging. Synchronically measured, students appear to go through periods of insecurity, narrowness of focus, active dislike of writing, and tightness as they tackle the kinds of writing that are typical in the academic and business worlds, but they move toward confidence, experimentation, and positive feelings about writing as they gain competence with these rhetorical modes and the more mature writing strategies they often entail. Diachronic studies may suggest ways that a college curriculum can build more steadily upon the positive feelings toward writing that emerge when very inexperienced writers first feel the pleasure and power of personal writing.

The last decade has been a process-conscious time. Yet, the likelihood is that many writing teachers are only vaguely aware of the research on the composing process and continue to teach rigid essay models too mechanically, without allowing for the stages by which "ideal" form is reached, the fact that rhetorical modes are usually mixed, or the fact that ideal forms must be allowed to permute in interplay with the topic. At the same time, process-oriented teachers are occasionally so hostile to teaching "products" that they stand in danger of underexploiting what

was useful in teaching models and failing to equip students with the highly functional, rhetorically effective models most often used to convey information quickly. There is nothing intrinsically superior about the "organic" essay which documents the writer's exploration of a subject and, perhaps, his change of mind over the more sophisticated essay which simulates the same discovery process, over the essay which begins by seeming to espouse one position (the one held by his audience), only to show the advantages of a different position, over the essay which matter-of-factly states a position and lays out the rationale that supports it. They are simply different shapes a treatment of the subject may take, each suitable for different audiences on different occasions. Thus, while a narrow preoccupation with meeting the formal requirements of paragraph development or of the five-paragraph essay or of the classical argument may produce writing that is wooden, repetitive, and vacuous, rhetorical models, broadly viewed, are among the most powerful heuristics. Teaching methods which integrate what we know about the various processes and products of writing, methods which do not create a false dichotomy, will best equip students with the procedural strategies and ideal forms they will need as academic, professional and personal writers.