

2 Definitions and Distinctions

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Revision might be defined quite straightforwardly as the act of making changes to a written document to make it better. In writing classrooms, students have other students to work with and a teacher to guide the revision process. Both the companionship and the help ought to smooth the way for student revisers. But teachers' experiences offer caution to this uncomplicated description. How do writers make the changes? What does "improve" mean? What roles do peers, teachers, readers, and writers themselves play? These questions, which are just the most obvious ones, show that seeking a definition of revision means grabbing the tiger's tail, and with it the whole of composition theory and writing instruction. In a 1982 monograph on revision, *Revising: New Essays for Teachers of Writing*, the editor, Ronald A. Sudol, makes precisely this point, noting that "when we examine revising as teachers and researchers, we find it to be related to almost everything else we know about writing" (ix).

Understanding the scholarly work on revision prepares teachers to assist college writers in their everyday writing challenge: to revise not just as an abstract, repeatable, predictable procedure, but to revise in the face of increasingly complex intellectual and rhetorical tasks. By keeping in mind the increasing complexity of the circumstances in which college writers revise, teachers will avoid oversimplifying and overgeneralizing their pedagogy on revision. They will recognize that student writers can benefit from thoughtful explanations of many aspects of revision and classroom practices which encourage energetic, active, intellectually vital revising. In this chapter I'll consider scholarly definitions of revision, some common understandings which develop in classroom practice, and students' efforts to understand and define revision.

REVISION DEFINED BY SCHOLARS

Along with reporting results of studies and articulating precise descriptions of revision, scholars offer vivid images and metaphorical language to assist their definitions. Unlike casual metaphorical language captured in a phrase like “clean up my writing,” however, the metaphors of scholars are deliberately wrought. The scholars’ definitions lay out extensive, ambitious ground for what revising might mean and raise significant questions about the nature of revisers and revising.

Composition scholars and writers often think in metaphors and images to explain revision. Some of these suggest movement or location in physical space, and they frequently consist of paired, contrastive terms. For example, Donald M. Murray discussed and contrasted “internal” and “external” revising in his essay, “Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery,” published in the 1978 volume *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*, edited by Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell. For Murray, the revising writer is paying attention both to the outside demands of correctness, forms, and appropriateness and to internal voices suggesting discoveries about structure, focus, and language (91). For internal revision, he says, “The audience is one person: the writer” (91).

Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, introduces two contrasting terms and a third, humorous kicker: “A friend of mine says that the first draft is the down draft—you just get it down. The second draft is the up draft—you fix it up. And the third draft is the dental draft (25–26). Since the “dental” draft is the fine points, the “up draft” must mean everything a writer has to do to assess the writing as a totality. Wendy Bishop, revision scholar and editor of a recent book on revision called *Acts of Revision: A Guide for Writers*, imagines the job as “revising out,” or extending and developing ideas as much as possible, then “revising in,” cutting and pruning with the confidence that you’ve given yourself lots to work with: “Revising out allows for revising in and often helps a writer as a result produce a better text because all investigations—of ideas, words, sentences, style, shape, and tone—are instructive to the interested writer” (“Revising Out and Revising In” 14).

Linda Flower’s cognitive model of revision also uses contrastive terms and movement. She sees revision as a turn, a change of direction or attention, a step, a transformation from a writer-centered to a read-

er-centered mode of writing. Her 1998 book *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing in College and Community* (a new edition with significant new sections and reworkings of her 1981 book *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing*) presents several examples of writer-based prose, characterized by “narrative organization and an egocentric focus,” reworked into reader-based prose, which has “more issue-centered hierarchical organization” (218). According to Flower, writers would be better off writing for readers from the start, but in the middle of complex writing tasks, can’t always manage. She offers four key points for doing this sort of revision, including formal organization “around a problem, a thesis, or a purpose”; a clear hierarchy which “distinguish[es] between your major and minor ideas, and make[s] the relationship between them explicit to the reader”; directly stated conclusions; and deliberate use of cues to point the way (220).

Compositionist Peter Elbow devotes several chapters to revision in his 1981 book *Writing with Power*. Instead of metaphor, he uses time references to quick revising (32–37) and thorough revising (128–138). The role metaphor plays for Elbow in this book is as a source of generative questions which stimulate revision. In *Being a Writer: A Community of Writers Revisited*, which Elbow wrote with Pat Belanoff, the scholars use two interrelated metaphors, levels and organic structures, to organize their thinking on revision. These levels include, in the authors’ words:

1. Reseeing or rethinking: changing what a piece says, or its “bones.”
2. Reworking or reshaping: changing how a piece says it, or changing its “muscles.”
3. Copyediting or proofreading for mechanics and usage: checking for deviations from standard conventions, or changing the writing’s “skin.” (124)

As the scholar who introduced and popularized freewriting, Elbow’s conceptions of revision emphasize the time task for writers and the organic, interrelated nature of texts.

Though mainly literal, the definition of revision offered by scholar Jill Fitzgerald contains a submerged metaphor of a gap to be bridged. In an article called “Research on Revision in Writing,” she says, drawing on a number of other works:

Revision means making any changes at any point in the writing process. It involves identifying discrepancies between intended and instantiated text, deciding what could or should be changed in the text and how to make desired changes and operating, that is, making the desired changes. Changes may or may not affect meaning of the text, and they may be major or minor. Also, changes may be made in the writer's mind before being instantiated in written text, at the time text is first written, and/or after text is first written. (484)

Fitzgerald's definition includes thinking, comparing, deciding, and choosing, then taking action. It is broadly inclusive, in that it accepts changes at any point in composing, including changes which occur in the mind, and it applies to any sort of change, significant or less so. What's important is the writer as agent; the actual changes, as well as their effect on the document, are less important.

Sometimes revision is conceived as attention to craft. Compositionist and linguist Alice S. Horning, in *Revision Revisited*, presents "weaving as a metaphor for the revision process writers follow" (1). Like weaving, composing and then revising text involve both the starting shape or warp, and the artistry of weft, all coming together: "To create the tapestry of a text, then, just pursuing this metaphor, the revisions made become the seamless, solid fabric of the complete document" (2). Extending from her metaphor is Horning's descriptive definition of revision, "the interaction of conscious and unconscious choices writers make in a draft as they weave readable writing for readers, drawing on a balance of several kinds of self-awareness and on specific skills to produce the finished fabric of a readable text" (5).

Craft is also the heart of Joseph Harris's recent definition of revision in the article, "Revision as a Critical Practice," published July 2003 in *College English*. Working with students on academic writing, Harris suggests "some ways of imagining revision as a practice of making stronger use of the work of others and of more clearly articulating one's own project as a writer" (591). In these two criteria, Harris provides measurable ways of ascertaining improvement in a reviser's work. He notes "the appeal of rooting our teaching in the actual labor of drafting, revising, and editing texts. And as in teaching someone to farm or sew, our job in teaching writing is to help students gain more

control over their work” (591). A craft depends on laboring. Accepting Harris’s analogy, students are less likely to insist that some people can write and others can’t. Rather, revising is a matter of learning how to work at it.

Stepping back from this selected group of scholarly definitions, one notices the frequency and importance of metaphorical thinking. Revision means movement: turning from self to reader; drafting both up and down, out and in; heeding interior and exterior voices. These images of movement witness to the active, fluid thinking of revision, its creativeness, and its multiple, interconnected tasks. Metaphors of craft signal high standards, whether in achieving a smooth weave or successful academic writing which comes through efforts similar to those of a farmer or a gardener. No magician’s wand here, but rather a rake, hot sun, a bandanna for sweat, and a sun-up to sun-down work ethic. Another important idea is increasing control. Writers come to know their ideas fully and control the ways they extend and elaborate them in documents.

The definitions suggest some ways to measure success. Using Flower, one looks for a hierarchy of ideas and cues for readers. Using Hornig, one expects the absence of unplanned irregularities. Using Harris, one values thesis control and competent integration of the work of others. Nevertheless, for students, knowing when revising is necessary and what steps will truly improve a document remain problematic.

REVISION DEFINED IN PRACTICE

Some collective understandings of revision have emerged from the major trends of composition history. While the trends have a historical dimension, they overlay each other as well. Using the terms of James A. Berlin, composition scholar and historian, “This diachronic diversity in rhetoric is matched by a synchronic one” (*Rhetoric and Reality* 3). Consult Anne Becker’s chapter for an extended explanation of historical aspects. The theories and trends of composition comprise a large, sprawling, and diverse family over a period of time. Members come and go, some are powerful and some have ordinary status, some seem revolutionary but their influence wanes as decades pass. Despite differences between family members, cohesion develops out of a common enterprise. The analogy to a large family suggests that composition teachers strive to understand how they have been “brought up”

as writing teachers, and what their students and they themselves say about revising.

Four aspects of revision are familiar in classrooms: (1) revision as correction; (2) revision as growth, development, and discovery; (3) revision as rhetorical goal-setting and function; (4) revision as assertion of identity, whether personal, political, or aesthetic. These conceptual pictures can be inferred from listing off some common metaphors for and statements about revising. We say “polish it up,” “clean it up,” “fix it,” “play with it some more,” “go in depth,” “make it sound better.” Writers sometimes talk about being “all over the place” or “lost” in their drafts, with revision directed at achieving better organization or “focus” (another common metaphor). Sometimes writers present the revision challenge as getting a particular job done, or opening up what they think or wish to say, or standing up for beliefs. These common statements reveal received wisdom, the methods and practices of teachers, and the assumptions of students.

REVISION AS CORRECTION

Students and teachers alike might think of revision mainly as correcting previous mistakes, the “fix-it-up” plan. In secondary school, some of us revised essays by writing the correct forms for misspelled words or grammatical goofs on the same copy of the paper, right above the teacher’s correction symbol. Students may still think of revising this way, depending on their high school experiences. The emphasis on correcting mistakes has its roots in “current-traditional” rhetoric, a set of assumptions that developed in the mid-nineteenth century and held sway for a century. Drawing on other scholars, revision scholar Jill Fitzgerald tells us that this emphasis on surface correction goes all the way back to Aristotle (“Research on Revision in Writing” 481–82). Current-traditional rhetoric has led to the dominance of the five-paragraph theme and modes of writing, and “[c]orrecting themes becomes the teacher’s primary, if not exclusive, concern,” according to W. Ross Winterowd, whose 1994 book, *A Teacher’s Introduction to Composition in the Rhetorical Tradition*, provides an eight-point overview of the main consequences of this instructional plan (31). As Robert J. Connors observes in *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*, it’s very easy to turn current-traditionalism into a straw-man or villain to

argue against (4–7). At the same time, one must understand the implications of a corrections-only view of revising.

Often, under current-traditional assumptions, the idea of correction occurs in a vague or absent context. Correct is simply correct; English is English. But students taught not to use acronyms will have trouble with upper-level papers for specialized engineering or computer-science courses, where acronyms occur constantly. Journalists don't write like historians, or the reverse. In reality, "correct" needs to be defined in a context and for a particular purpose, without the comfort of solid, unvarying rules.

Another drawback of current-traditional assumptions comes from a coding of mistakes. I remember my father railing at the ignorance of someone who said, "Where are you at?" In the unneeded "at," he inferred class distinctions, perhaps moral distinctions, even though he understood the speaker perfectly well. When students make mistakes, or use nonstandard terms or dialect, it's important not to let that signify some sort of general ignorance or unfitness. Thus, writing instruction today tries to balance a respect for students' own language, drawing from a 1972 resolution at the Conference on College Composition and Communication called "Students' Right to Their Own Language" and reaffirmed in 2003, while at the same time helping students understand the conventions of academic writing and speech.

Current-traditional assumptions blur the useful distinction between revising and editing. Full scale revising may include major new sections of text or even a substantially new try at a document, while editing involves spelling, grammar, mechanics, word-usage, and other local concerns. In blurring the distinction, students and teachers alike overlook conceptual revision. Whatever the person drafted the first time becomes the end point, and major rethinking or reassessing isn't a serious option.

Someone should put in a good word for correction, as long as it doesn't take over all other aspects of revising. Sometimes, when teachers reexamine students' papers, a second look leads to correcting an overall impression of a student, reconsidering one's own marginal comments, and changing strategies with assignments. Students who misread assignments have the benefit of a second try and can deal with slips in word-usage, punctuation, even what "saved" version of a word-processed document they've submitted. In a relatively forgiving framework where not everything has to be nailed down exactly on the

first try, correction helps everybody manage day-to-day matters in the classroom.

Revision defined as correction becomes problematic when it asserts one single, acceptable form of English language to which every writer must conform and for every purpose, and when it gives the teachers marking the corrections too much clout. Revision as correction also squeezes out conceptual revision, because surface correction implicitly pairs with stipulated models or formulas in current-traditional pedagogy. Keith Hjortshoj, in *The Transition to College Writing*, likens the five-paragraph essay to a “footstool,” a simple piece of furniture that the craftsperson must soon move beyond. When students have little power to make choices, when they sense the limited range of a closed, predictable form, and when they are not part of the decision-making process about how and when to revise, they lose interest and passion. They regard revision as that tedious effort demanded by teachers as a condition for raising grades.

REVISION AS DEVELOPMENT AND DISCOVERY

Students who say they need to go in depth when they tackle an essay again, flesh out ideas, or find their voice often are speaking as learners in a process-centered classroom. Since the process revolution in writing instruction, which started in the 1960s and gained momentum through the 1970s, writers of all ages have gotten familiar with writing workshops, peer editing, brainstorming techniques, and multiple drafting. Developing at roughly the same time as process pedagogy, word-processing changed the landscape of revising dramatically. Instead of the torture endured by the amateur typist, forced to retype whole pages to fix a crucial mistake, there’s instant and easy repair with a few keystrokes of word-processing. Adding became easy, so much so that some scholars began to observe a discrepancy between some students’ professional-looking word-processed texts and the casual additions to create length or an illusion of completeness. Despite this critique, for most writers it’s a joy to add, to create, as composition scholar Wendy Bishop calls it, a “fat draft” and to draft “generously,” with more than the writer will ever need (“Revising Out and Revising In” 16). The process movement brought writing back into the classroom, students occupying themselves with drafting, conferencing, re-

vising, and moving around in the room and also moving around in the writing process, or processes.

A process orientation blurs the distinction between composing and revising, usefully so. In a word-processed document, layers of drafts don't exist unless a writer makes a special effort to keep printing them out. Meticulous writers, who often perfect each sentence as they compose, revise on the screen. In classrooms, the existence of a revising stage results not only from writers' decisions but also from the syllabus and the teacher's schedule of reading and returning essays.

Process theorists shifted from a stage model of composing (writing happens in clear stages, one after the other, like baking brownies), to a recursion model (writers jump around in the process, restructuring in big bold steps, then fussing with a paragraph or sentence, then rereading a source and introducing a quotation, etc.). This recursion model brings in cognitive psychology. Investigating how thoughts and words team up leads to thinking about revision as not just happening to a page of text but something happening within the cognitive apparatus of the writer. And just as at a certain point it seemed incomplete to study psychology without learning about the brain, and putting behavior and brain function together, likewise, writing scholars began to ask questions about the mental processes that underlie revision. Anne Becker's chapter takes up these questions in much more detail.

The process movement led to defining revision not just as changes to a text but to events related to work habits and actions and mental events. The writer plays an active role and peers come in as friendly compatriots. Development, extension, and growth, as well as reflection, are the hallmarks of revision as a process-centered event.

REVISION AS RHETORICAL GOAL-SETTING AND FUNCTION

As composition gained recognition as a discipline, the new status generated upper-level writing courses, specialized courses, programs in writing across the curriculum, and first-year courses with a clearly rhetorical focus and design. Teachers assigned documents in a variety of genres in addition to essays in the traditional sense, and classroom investigations centered around the function and work of documents. Students who thought about revisions in terms of what work the document accomplished or its function for a particular discourse community were learning in classrooms structured around rhetorical

analysis. Instead of seeking their own authentic tone, writers thought about appropriate roles or personae. They read academic and popular writing to detect appropriate lexicon and register for their purposes, which might change from one writing task to another. This rhetorical emphasis in some sense follows process, but also subsumes it. W. Ross Winterowd's discussion of "Neo-Classical Rhetoric" and "New Rhetoric" (*A Teacher's Introduction* 30–51) provides a useful primer to composition's return to the concepts of rhetoric starting from the mid-1970s and on.

Students who learned to assess their writing for the work it might do in a real, often public environment, who wrote collaboratively, and who understood conventions as enabling structures and not just constricting ones, found themselves well-prepared for both academic and non-academic writing projects, and for specialized kinds of writing. If the rhetorical approach has a limitation, it may be that it pays too little attention to joyfulness and play in writing. My favorite teachers explained the conventions and showed how to use them, but also showed how much fun it was, on occasion, to play against them or with them. If the reviser understands how to balance risks and benefits, the functional quality of writing becomes just one measure, not the only one.

REVISION AS ASSERTION OF IDENTITY

Writers don't just write to fit in, to become part of a group. They write to stand up, stand out, speak up, depart from the group, and many of our most memorable writers, from Henry David Thoreau to Shirley Brice Heath to students whose words still echo in our heads, have a vision of truth or beauty which dominates their work. There's a timeless quality to the urge to perfect one's writing; writers labor over their words to create powerful, moving, original discourse. See Chapter 9 by David Calonne for an investigation of revision in the work of literary writers. Revision as an assertion of identity also connects to postmodernism, which has opened up nonstandard forms for writing and a space for non-mainstream groups and insights.

Nancy Welch, author of *Getting Restless: Rethinking Revision in Writing Instruction*, questions "ways of talking in classrooms about revision that, despite the displacements of post-modernity, continue to posit the ideal of a stable, clear, and complete text" (137). Her work calls into question "this continued insistence on words like *clarity*,

consistency, and *completeness* [Welch's emphasis] at a time when other cherished and problematic goals have given way" (137). In a chapter called "Revising a Writer's Identity," Welch discusses "revision as strategy for intervening in the meanings and identifications of one's life" (55). The important question for Welch about teaching is, "How do we facilitate the recognition and revision of what we're identifying with, who we are imitating—and what's being denied, suppressed or perpetuated in the process?" (56).

Revision sometimes means undermining and challenging assumptions, philosophies, or practices and then remaking them. This interpretation brings to mind texts that explode the idea of revision and carry it to large scale reimaginings, for instance Sharon Crowley's *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*, or Eleanor Kutz's and Hepzibah Roskelly's *An Unquiet Pedagogy: Transforming Practice in the English Classroom*, or *Writing and Revising the Disciplines*, edited by Jonathan Monroe. These works take up, respectively, the place of the composition course in a university education, the mood and workings of the composition classroom, and the place and use of writing as part of the definition of academic disciplines. With such works, revision blurs into reformation or revolution.

Intentional, motivated writers may care deeply about their ideas, philosophy, and declaration of self, and as individualists they can construct the reader or readers their art requires. Teachers have a responsibility to question to what extent writing classrooms should radicalize or politicize students. As teachers, do we revise society or do we revise texts? For individual writers, what's the balance between a writer's idiosyncratic wordings and readers' access to texts?

Most would agree that instruction on revision properly takes up correcting, discovering, rhetorical strategizing, and asserting identity and individual meanings. Chapters that follow on best practices by Carol Trupiano and on the practical side of revision by Cathleen Breidenbach explore in detail how these understandings ought to be pursued and in what combinations and balances.

STUDENTS AND REVISION

One subject for revision research has been the differences between the revision strategies of mature writers and novice writers. Compositionist Nancy Sommers, in a 1980 essay titled "Revision Strategies of Student

Writers and Experienced Adult Writers,” found significant differences both in what each group worried about and what each group did: “But unlike the students, experienced writers make changes on all levels and use all revision operations. [. . .] Unlike the students the experienced writers possess a nonlinear theory in which a sense of the whole writing both precedes and grows out of an examination of the parts. (126) Sommers calls on metaphor to explain the thinking strategies of mature writers. She says, “The experienced writers describe their primary objective when revising as finding the form or shape of their argument. Although the metaphors vary, the experienced writers often use structural expressions such as ‘finding a framework,’ ‘a pattern,’ or ‘a design’ for their argument” (125).

In Alice Horning’s *Revision Revisited*, what mature writers do is defined and differentiated into two sets: awarenesses and skills. According to Horning, “writers balance their awarenesses and skills to weave readable texts through revision. To fully understand revision, we must examine both awarenesses and skills” (10). Consult Horning’s chapter in this volume for an enumeration and explanation of awarenesses and skills.

Both Sommers and Horning would say that when students don’t revise very much, or revise with limited success, it’s because they don’t see what to do or see paths to follow to do it. Although one might consider students’ lifestyles, psychological stage, or motivation, writing teachers probably need to concentrate on students’ inexperience with revision. Nancy Sommers says, “The evidence from my research suggests that it is not that students are unwilling to revise, but rather that they do what they have been taught to do in a consistently narrow and predictable way” (123). In responding to papers, teachers have an opportunity to do more than mark errors. Teachers’ suggestions ought to focus on the important tasks of revising and also give some idea of how to go about it. Since the time Sommers did her work in 1980, teachers have more resources, notably Donald M. Murray’s *The Craft of Revision*, 5th edition, and Wendy Bishop’s edited collection of essays on revision for students, *Acts of Revision: A Guide for Writers*, both published in 2004.

Even students who have some awareness of what’s needed may not carry through. Wayne C. Peck has studied this problem in “The Effects of Prompts on Revision: A Glimpse of the Gap Between Planning and Performance,” published in the 1990 collection *Reading to Write:*

Exploring a Cognitive and Social Process. Peck's study shows that while some students have limited intentions, others have solid, ambitious intentions for revision which they can explain well; what's missing is follow-through. It may not be enough to ask students for a revision plan; perhaps teachers also should ask for a specific description of the revision, with text references and comparisons.

The terror of the blank page is commonplace. In its own way, revision could be just as overwhelming, especially for anyone seeing the gap between intended and instantiated text, in Fitzgerald's terms, but not seeing the means to close the gap. Brock Dethier speaks of "Revising Attitudes" in Bishop's *Acts of Revision*. Much of his advice is for students with negative attitudes about revision and how to overcome them. But there's advice for teachers too. He says, "Practiced revisers can work almost simultaneously on scores of processes, from checking homophones to rethinking theses. But I find that simple, step-by-step approaches can best open writers' eyes to the value of revision and lead us to make major changes without thinking, 'I'm revising'" (10). Novice writers may be less aware of revising practices and possibilities and at the same time more aware of revising as a looming difficulty, as they worry about how to make their documents satisfactory. While teachers can glory in the free movement and creativity of revising, novice writers may do better in a classroom which provides a protected space for comfortable yet still challenging learning.

Keith Hjortshoj, a social sciences researcher and a director, at one time, of writing across the curriculum and writing center activities at Cornell, has done interesting work on writing blocks. Blocks occur at times of rapid change and jumps in the level of difficulty, he says in *Understanding Writing Blocks*. While most would maintain that we are doing our jobs as college writing teachers if we present students with increasingly difficult intellectual challenges and new rhetorical situations, we also need to understand the danger of overload and breakdown.

Recently, I asked students in a first-semester college composition class to tell me if they liked revising. Their responses were instructive. While some students might be unsure how to revise, or sense what to do but not carry through, or feel overwhelmed as they combine disparate tasks, students can also be quite pragmatic, as mine were. One said because no one's going to use the paper again, what's the purpose of revising? One student said she actually liked revising, implying that

her answer went against expectation. One gave qualified approval of revising, that it's okay as long as you don't have to re-do the whole paper and worth it if you can raise your grade. In fact, quite a few students said they liked revising because you could raise your grade, but the downside was that it was time-consuming. Several said revising helps you understand your writing better so you can improve. According to one student, college writing classes offer teachers who take revising seriously, thus resulting in more interesting possibilities for students at the revision phase.

By and large, these students were practical-minded, regarding revision partly as a learning tool, partly as a negotiation about grades. I like to think I build revision into my whole course, and that in peer groups and read-alouds and conferences, we're always talking about how to revise, yet when my students answered this question they thought about "revision" mainly as a discrete step listed in the syllabus. They also tended to think of it in connection to a grade, although it wouldn't need to be. Thus a major incongruity develops around the function of revision, whether the reward is a grade, standing outside the work, or improved writing, an implicit reward. A second incongruity is in the placement of revision, whether in one place quite late in the writing of a paper, as students often think, or embedded and recursive as writing professionals present it.

CRUCIAL ROLE FOR TEACHING REVISION WELL

To teach revision well, teachers must present techniques and skills and remember what it feels like to be a novice. As a case in point, advanced mathematics is a mystery to me. I couldn't give you a list of what and why; instead, it's an undifferentiated, confusing, threatening blob. Students may have this reaction to revising, and thus teachers must take the time to untangle the processes, coach awarenesses and skills, and do revision exercises in class.

Beyond skills, however, students need intrinsic and valid reasons for trying. Revising can be key to understanding one's own thinking as well as the subject thought about. A measure of success concerning revising comes in what's been learned. By developing systematic habits for reading and then revising their own work, students may learn to appreciate themselves as writers. Thus, students develop important awarenesses about themselves as writers (see Alice Horning's chapter

in this volume for a brief summary and *Revision Revisited* for extensive explanation). Not everyone writes quickly, in a flash of brilliance, but many know how to get seriously to work on something. Exerting the same sort of honest labor, student writers will have a solid sense of accomplishment.

Scholar and culture critic Gerald Graff, in an essay called “Disliking Books at an Early Age,” (presented to first-year writing students by Wendy Bishop in her *On Writing: A Process Reader*, 137–45) explains that until he was introduced to a critical vocabulary and active, dynamic discussions about readings, he was without a point of entry or way to engage with texts. The necessary critical framework came first, the enjoyment next. There was no naïve, holistic immersion in the text for Graff, who needed to learn how to read interpretatively before he could read with concentration and focus. His teachers helped him make sense of reading. It’s likely that some students could resemble Graff not only in their reading but in their writing as well, so that as they learn to inspect their drafts closely, to consider their readers, to discover and complicate their meanings, and to work towards an architectural or gestalt-level view of their text, they’ll invest more in composing and writing generally.

There’s perhaps no natural appetite for acts of revision in writing. Professionals, who revise as a matter of course, have years of training informing their practice. Even at the college level, students may resist revising, dislike it, or do it in perfunctory or desultory ways. Yet many students both acknowledge reasons for revising and command considerable resources for achieving results. Although students may teach themselves to revise, especially in groups of supportive friends, and although people outside formal teaching environments also find means and methods to become revisers, the writing teacher can help writers become revisers. It might be our most important job.