

Rev Up Revision

Strategies for Teaching Students to Revise



An Oklahoma Writing Project Presentation
by L. Alicia Lacy

An essential part of the writing process, revision is often overlooked and misunderstood. From upper elementary to higher education, students benefit when we empower them with strategies for revising. See immediate results with Barry Lane's user-friendly "building a scene" approach, which equips students with the tools they need to revise for sensory details, character and setting details, interior monologues, flashbacks, dialogue, and more. Expand students' options as writers by teaching them *how* to revise.



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Presentation Objectives

During this presentation, participants will learn to:

- teach students strategies for enriching their writing with character and setting details, internal monologues, flashbacks, flash forwards, and dialogue;
- incorporate models and picture prompts into writing instruction;
- expand students' options as writers; and
- encourage and enhance revision.

PASS Correlations

The following Priority Academic Student Skills Language Arts Writing/Grammar/Usage and Mechanics standards are addressed through the activities and assignments discussed during this presentation:

Grade 3

- **Standard 1:** The student will use the writing process to write coherently.
- **Standard 1.3:** Revise selected drafts, changing or adding details and vivid words.

Grade 4

- **Standard 1:** The student will use the writing process to write coherently.
- **Standard 1.3:** Revise selected drafts by adding, elaborating, deleting, combining, and rearranging text.

Grade 5

- **Standard 1.1:** Use the writing process to develop, extend, and refine composition skills.
- **Standard 1.5:** Review, evaluate, and revise selected drafts by adding, elaborating, deleting, combining, and rearranging text for meaning and clarity.

Grades 6-8

- **Standard 1.1:** Use a writing process to develop composition skills. Students are expected to use prewriting strategies, write and revise multiple drafts, edit, and share their compositions.
- **Standard 1.2:** Use details, examples, reasons, and evidence to develop an idea.

Grades 9-10

- **Standard 1.1:** Use a writing process to develop and refine composition skills.
- **Standard 1.2:** Use extension and elaboration to develop an idea.

Grade 11

- **Standard 1.1:** Use a writing process to develop and refine composition skills.
- **Standard 1.4:** Use point of view, characterization, style, and related elements for specific rhetorical (communication) and aesthetic (artistic) purposes.

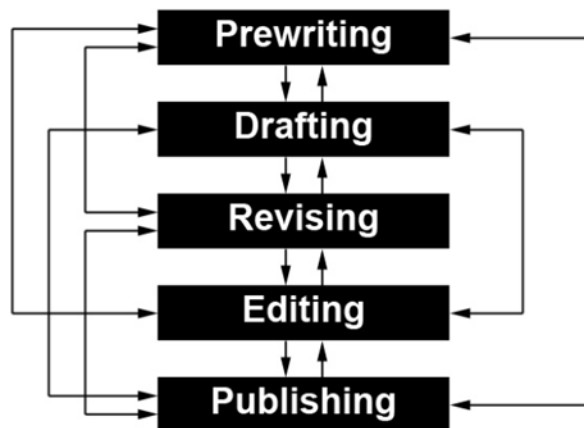
Grade 12

- **Standard 1.1:** Use a writing process to develop and refine composition skills.
- **Standard 1.4:** Use point of view, characterization, style, and related elements for specific rhetorical (communication) and aesthetic (artistic) purposes.

The Writing Process

From the shortest poems to the longest novels, writing is a process. The writing process consists of five dynamic stages: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.

The stages of the writing process are not a linear progression of steps. Writers do not move from stage to stage in a prescribed order like a runner clearing hurdles on a track. Instead, the writing process is recursive and cyclical. Writers weave in and out of stages like an ice skater twirling around, gliding up and down the rink.



Prewriting

Prewriting strategies to help writers generate and organize ideas include: thinking; reading; discussing; freewriting; creating lists and word banks; researching; drawing; outlining; and organizing ideas graphically with webs, clusters, charts, etc. An essential step, prewriting should account for 70 to 85 percent of writing time.¹ Research indicates skilled writers spend significantly more time organizing and planning before writing.² However, on average, most students spend about three minutes preparing to write.³

Drafting

Drafting is **writer-centered**. Using ideas generated through prewriting, writers create drafts putting ideas into sentences and paragraphs with a focus on content; explaining, supporting, and beginning to connect ideas; and concentrating on what the writer knows and thinks about the topic.

Revising

Revising is **reader-centered**. Concentrating on content (not mechanics) and predicting readers' needs and expectations, writers revise by adding, deleting, moving, and replacing text. While revising, writers focus on ideas, details, word choice, organization, and sentence variety.

Editing

In preparation for publishing, editing involves correcting errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics.

Publishing

Providing an authentic audience, publishing includes displaying a piece of writing in the classroom; reading it aloud; posting it on the Internet; printing it in a class anthology; entering it in a contest; and submitting it to a newspaper or magazine.

1. Donald R. Murray, *Learning by Teaching* (Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1982).

2. George Hillocks, Jr., *Research on Written Composition* (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1986).

3. U.S. Dept. of Education, *Can Students Benefit from Process Writing?* (Washington, D.C.: NAEP, Apr. 1996).

Snapshots

A snapshot in writing is description that captures sharp physical details—smells, sounds, colors, and light.

Sketch a Person

Similar to the quick drawings artists make in sketchbooks, writers often describe characters in a few sentences, saying as much as possible about a person with a few well chosen details.

Examples from Literature

“A giant of a man was standing in the doorway. His face was almost completely hidden by a long, shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under all the hair.”

— J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*

“She wore an off-white dress so long it covered her shoes. It had ruffles around the neck and cuffs and looked like it could have been her great-grandmother’s wedding gown. Her hair was the color of sand. It fell to her shoulders. Something was strapped across her back. At first I thought it was a miniature guitar. I found out later it was a ukulele.”

— Jerry Spinelli, *Stargirl*

Sketch a Place

Writers often introduce a setting by creating a sketch of a place. They capture concrete details with a few quick “strokes,” evoking a mood or personality or aura beyond what’s physically there.

Example from Literature

“The edge of the sky turned gray, and then pale orange, and then deep fiery crimson. The land stood out against it, a long black rolling line. One spot along this line grew so bright they could hardly look at it, so bright it seemed to take a bite out of the land. It rose higher and higher until they could see that it was a fiery circle, first deep orange and then yellow, and too bright to look at any longer. The color seeped out of the sky and washed over the land. Light sparkled on the soft hair of the hills and shone through the lacy leaves as every shade of green sprang to life around them.”

— Jeanne DuPrau, *City of Ember*

Thoughtshots

A thoughtshot is written description that captures what the author or a character is thinking or feeling. Used in fiction and non-fiction, thoughtshots place events in a context and give the reader a reason to be interested.

Examples from Literature

“I wondered how she could say that. What was so great about me? A dyslexic, hyperactive boy with a D+ report card, kicked out of school for the sixth time in six years.”

— Rick Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*

“Facing my pallid reflection in the mirror, I was forced to admit that I was lying to myself. It wasn’t just physically that I’d never fit in. And if I couldn’t find a niche in a school with three thousand people, what were my chances here?”

— Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight*

Dialogue

Dialogue is simply a conversation between characters in a piece of writing.

Example from Literature

“—Hey, Rob! Live game, man. You be flyin’ with the hoops, man! Swoosh! Ain’t nobody better, ’cept maybe me.

—Yo, Andy, my main man! I see you been eatin’ bull crap for dinner again! You only *wish* you was as good as me! I, Robert Orlando Washington, will be makin’ *billions* of dollars playin’ for the N.B.A.! Want me to save you a ticket to one of my games?

—Man, you be trippin’! You better be lookin’ out for *me*—here’s my card—Andy Jackson—superstar shooter and lover to the ladies—’cause I’m gonna be the high-point man on the opposin’ team—the team that wipes the floor with you and your billion dollars!

—Dream on, superstar! Just for that, I’m gonna make you *buy* your ticket!

—Let’s get outta here, man, before I feel the need to dust you off. This locker room smell really funky tonight.”

— Sharon M. Draper, *Tears of a Tiger*

Build a Scene

Combine snapshots, thoughtshots, and dialogue to build a scene using the following equation:

SNAPSHOTS + THOUGHTSHOTS + DIALOGUE = SCENE

Example from Literature

“This trip, I was determined to be good.

All the way into the city, I put up with Nancy Bobofit, the freckly, redheaded kleptomaniac girl, hitting my best friend Grover in the back of the head with chunks of peanut butter-and-ketchup sandwich.

Grover was an easy target. He was scrawny. He cried when he got frustrated. He must’ve been held back several grades, because he was the only sixth grader with acne and the start of a wispy beard on his chin. On top of all that, he was crippled. He had a note excusing him from PE for the rest of his life because he had some kind of muscular disease in his legs. He walked funny, like every step hurt him, but don’t let that fool you. You should’ve seen him run when it was enchilada day in the cafeteria.

Anyway, Nancy Bobofit was throwing wads of sandwich that stuck in his curly brown hair, and she knew I couldn’t do anything back to her because I was already on probation. The headmaster had threatened me with death by in-school suspension if anything bad, embarrassing, or even mildly entertaining happened on this trip.

‘I’m going to kill her,’ I mumbled.

Grover tried to calm me down. ‘It’s okay. I like peanut butter.’

He dodged another piece of Nancy’s lunch.

‘That’s it.’ I started to get up, but Grover pulled me back to my seat.

‘You’re already on probation,’ he reminded me. ‘You know who’ll get blamed if anything happens.’

Looking back on it, I wish I’d decked Nancy Bobofit right then and there. In-school suspension would’ve been nothing compared to the mess I was about to get myself into.”

— Rick Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*

Building a Scene

In response to a picture prompt, write a snapshot, a thoughtshot, and dialogue. Then combine them together to build a scene using the following equation: SNAPSHOT + THOUGHTSHOT + DIALOGUE = SCENE. (See the example from young adult literature on the back.)

Snapshot

Sketch a person/place with character/setting details.

+

Thoughtshot

Capture what a person is thinking or feeling.

=

+

Dialogue

Reveal character details and/or move the plot along with realistic conversation.

Scene

Snapshot + Thoughtshot + Dialogue = Scene

Example of a Scene from Literature

Excerpt from *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer

Snapshot:

His hair was dripping wet, disheveled—even so, he looked like he’d just finished shooting a commercial for hair gel. His dazzling face was friendly, open, a slight smile on his flawless lips. But his eyes were careful.

+

Thoughtshot:

My mind was spinning with confusion. Had I made up the whole thing? He was perfectly polite now. I had to speak; he was waiting. But I couldn’t think of anything conventional to say.

+

Dialogue:

“My name is Edward Cullen,” he continued. “I didn’t have a chance to introduce myself last week. You must be Bella Swan.”

“H-how do you know my name?” I stammered.

“Oh, I think everyone knows your name. The whole town’s been waiting for you to arrive.”

Scene:

“Hello,” said a quiet, musical voice. I looked up, stunned that he was speaking to me. He was sitting as far away as the desk allowed, but his chair was angled toward me. His hair was dripping wet, disheveled—even so, he looked like he’d just finished shooting a commercial for hair gel. His dazzling face was friendly, open, a slight smile on his flawless lips. But his eyes were careful.

“My name is Edward Cullen,” he continued. “I didn’t have a chance to introduce myself last week. You must be Bella Swan.”

My mind was spinning with confusion. Had I made up the whole thing? He was perfectly polite now. I had to speak; he was waiting. But I couldn’t think of anything conventional to say.

“H-how do you know my name?” I stammered.

He laughed a soft, enchanting laugh.

“Oh, I think everyone knows your name. The whole town’s been waiting for you to arrive.”

— Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight*
(pages 43-44)

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