Revising

Once the first draft has been written, students can more clearly see what information does and does not work within their papers. Rarely have they explained everything clearly, included enough research, or kept a focused idea running through their papers during this first draft. Revising is much more than just changing words and sentences; it involves adding information, deleting unnecessary paragraphs or sentences, changing the overall structure, or moving sentences. Ideas that can help students with revision include the following:

- Does the paper say everything that the writer wants it to?
- Is the thesis statement too broad or too narrow?
- What is confusing for the audience? What is clear?
- What needs more evidence? What claims are fully supported?
- What is tangential? What is relevant?
- What is poorly developed or incomplete? What is well developed or clear?

Professors often feel overwhelmed at the idea of having to read multiple drafts of students’ papers. One way to avoid this is to hold peer-revision workshops. These sessions can be helpful for the students because writers see another’s view of their paper. Also, students are more responsible for their learning and often become more aware of what is required of them to fulfill an assignment by reading others’ work.

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Fulwiler identifies four suggestions for students working with tutors in a writing center, which would apply to anyone, of course: limiting, adding, switching, and transforming.

In limiting, Fulwiler means asking for telling details, forcing students to become specific rather than general, a problem with many first draft narratives. He also notes that students draw conclusions too soon rather than letting the story speak for itself. Often this is not the conclusion they end up with when the story is reworked and revised. This may stem from students fulfilling what they believe the reader (i.e., the teacher) wants.
In response, Fulwiler asks students to take one paragraph and write two new pages about it, paying special attention to specifics and not telling what “usually” happens but what happened on one specific instance, “limiting time, place, and action . . . “ (194).

He also suggests that students become intimately involved in the up-close geography of a topic, working in groups so as not to harass people and organizations with too many interviews or visitors. Besides being more efficient, it replicates the typical work collaboration that goes on in the work world.

In **adding**, Fulwiler suggests ways to make writing more vital, such as adding dialogue in a close approximation of what might have been said, including interior monologue. These voices may also be contributed from real interviews with people, which would require accuracy then. The result would make any writing more compelling.

In **switching**, he asks students to try out different perspectives, such as a different point of view with the writer role-playing (meaning third person if the event was personal). Other perspectives might be gained by changing the tone of the piece, such as satire, comedy, or drama.

**Transforming** is similar to switching but in genre rather than voice. Some ideas might be to make a personal experience into a series of letters, or a straight forward essay into a “modest proposal.” The idea is that no real-world writing looks anything like what most students write in college English, according to Fulwiler. Writing a scene for a soap opera may be more informative—and often more influential—than a sober expository or argumentative paper. As in Fulwiler’s example of the student writing about picking potatoes in her youth, her final draft proved to be infinitely more powerful with some of these revision devices.