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Lesson Plan

Handout 1: Strategies for Revision

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Students: a text to be revised

### LEARNING GOALS

At the close of the workshop, students will be able to:

- Identify concerns for revision and prioritize those concerns.
- Choose a strategy for revision based on their assessment of a paper.
- Make large changes to strengthen argument, analysis, or clarity.

### OVERVIEW

In this workshop, three primary activities take place:

- Students describe concerns for their drafts in order to collaboratively distinguish between essay-level concerns and smaller-scale concerns.
- As a group, students consider several strategies for revision and select one to practice.
- Students spend time implementing one or more revision strategies and reflect on their experience.

## LESSON PLAN

### Introduction

Frame this workshop as an opportunity to begin developing a more efficient and independent revision process. Emphasize that while students will work on a single draft (and thereby strengthen a specific paper), they will be practicing strategies they can apply again in the future.

Make sure all students have brought in drafts of papers, covers letters, or other written materials for today's workshop. **Say:** Today, everyone will need a piece writing they want to revise. Since this workshop is focused on independent writing and revising, it may feel a little different from other Writing Center workshops you have attended in the past. Of the center's more than twenty workshops, many are focused on introducing new concepts or skills. Others, such as today's workshop, are focused on helping you apply these skills to revise or develop a specific writing project.

State that this workshop introduces students to revision strategies and gives them time to apply at least one. Today, we will discuss everyone's concerns for their drafts, go over several strategies for essay-level revision, and give students time to practice.

**Say:** Our aim today is to give you time to write and revise, and to create a space where you feel comfortable trying something new.

### Part One: Defining Essay-Level Revision (15 Min)

1. **Lead a conversation about students' revision goals: ask what they hope to address in their current drafts,** and record their responses on the board.
  - Prompt as necessary with questions: *Where do you want to make changes? What's troubling you about the current draft? What kind of feedback have you received on this paper? What do feedback do you typically receive on your writing?*

#### Possible responses might include:

- Improve "flow"
- I don't really have a thesis
- I need a counter-argument
- My professor says she can't understand me
- Not everything is relevant
- I need better transitions
- Proofread
- Correct run-on sentences
- Too much plot summary
- Improve vocabulary

2. **Ask students, "In what order might you address these concerns—or in what order do you think you would address them in a Writing Center session?"**

- **On the board,** circle the larger, essay-level concerns as students identify them.
  - Elicit the understanding that, in Writing Center sessions, we usually start with the larger-scale concerns.
  - Note that some students may find it helpful to think of concerns as falling into three

broad categories—essay-, paragraph-, or sentence-level concerns—when making a plan for revision.

- **Say** that, when we are revising and pressed for time, we sometimes focus on making more minor changes—substituting words or phrases, correcting grammar—instead of reconsidering our whole drafts. However, revising is ideally about changing, improving, and taking risks with your writing.
  - While the idea of **“radical revision”** might feel risky or uncomfortable, it’s often the quickest, easiest way to strengthen a paper’s argument and improve its structure.
  - **Today**, we will focus on giving students strategies to help address larger concerns: at the essay- or paragraph- level.
- Acknowledge the interdependency of some essay-level and sentence-level concerns.
- **For example**, if you’re not sure your thesis statement is strong, this will require sentence-level refinement even while that refinement requires an essay-level revision. The great thing about addressing essay-level concerns *first* is that this process often directs your attention to the sentences that impact your overall meaning and argument the most (i.e. thesis, topic sentences, transitions between sections).
  - **Note that we also offer a workshop on revising at the sentence level.**
3. **Segue to Part Two:** tell students that today, they’ll look at some specific strategies designed to help them reimagine their papers. Explain that these strategies are designed to make the experience of large-scale revision a little less daunting, and to help students make new discoveries about their writing along the way.

## Part Two: Revision Strategies (10 Min)

1. **Pass out Handout 1: “Revision Strategies”** and explain that their job is to select one and implement it.
2. **As a group, read through the strategies.** Pausing after each one, ask students when they would use it and elicit questions. Offer the following guidance to help them choose:
  - Use Strategy #1 if you think there’s something missing: background information, explanation of a key term, or a paragraph tying several strands of an argument together.
  - Try Strategy # 2 if you’re concerned about structure, you worry that you repeat yourself, or you think your essay might lack focus. Reiterate that this strategy can help address paragraph- and essay-level concerns alongside each other.
  - Strategy #3 can help you to focus on the most important revisions first.
  - Try Strategy #4 if you feel that you express yourself better in speech than when in writing.
  - Strategy #5 will help you experiment with reorganizing options.
3. **Say:** you may begin with one revision strategy and quickly discover that you need to use *more than one*. For example, if you begin reverse outlining (Strategy #2) and discover that you’re missing something you need—say, a paragraph of background information that defines key terms for your argument—move to Strategy #1 and begin writing a new paragraph.
4. Ask students to share which strategy they will start with.

## Part Three: Revision Activity (40 Min)

1. Give students time to employ one or more of the revision strategies.
  - *Note to facilitator:* circulate and help students choosing Strategy #4 to pair up. If there is an odd number of students, create one group of three. Partner up with a student if there is only one. Be available for questions as they arise, and feel free to try out a revision strategy of your own. Give students time markers halfway through.
2. **Have students reflect on the work they did and what next steps they will take to continue to revise their essays.**
3. **Solicit questions.** Wrap Up.

## STRATEGIES FOR REVISION

### 1. TO WRITE A NEW SECTION

Take out a blank sheet of paper or open up a new document on your computer. Next, look through your existing draft to find a sentence that you want to expand on: one where you still have something to figure out, or that doesn't quite seem to match your current thesis statement. Copy that sentence into your new document, and use this sentence as a starting point to write a new paragraph.

### 2. TO WORK ON ORGANIZATION

*(reverse outline)*

Create a “reverse outline” of your draft by going through it paragraph-by-paragraph. For each, ask yourself: “What is the main idea?” (Identify what you *actually* wrote, not just what you *meant* to write.) This outline may reveal essay- or paragraph-level opportunities for revision—or both! For example:

- If there are gaps in your argument or unnecessary repetitions, this indicates that you need to make changes to your structure and organization. Cut or rearrange your paragraphs to achieve this goal.
- If a paragraph's main idea was not easy to figure out, this indicates that you need to clarify. Try writing a new topic sentence that more closely reflects the idea you hope to communicate. If needed, rewrite the paragraph as a whole.

### 3. TO ADDRESS YOUR READER'S CONCERNS

*(after you've received feedback)*

Examine your reader's comments and figure out what *types* of changes they are asking for—Changes to your argument? Structure? Grammar? Be specific: if the bulk of comments focus on your use of sources, for example, you might make one of your categories “Paraphrasing” or “Interpreting quotes.” Write three of your revision priorities on a separate sheet of paper. Decide which of these are most and least important, and number them in order, leaving plenty of space below each heading. Starting with the most important, make a list of the revisions you would have to make to address this category. Once you have a working list of action items, begin to tackle each task.

*Sample list of action items for a literature paper:*

#### 1. Revising Structure

- Reverse outline so that I know what my main points are
- Make sure my introduction is a “roadmap” that shows what points I will cover, and in what order
- Revise topic sentences to guide the reader through my argument

#### 2. Interpreting Quotes

- Make sure each paragraph has one quote to analyze
- Spend as much time interpreting quotes as I spend writing them out: look at key words and metaphors and explain how they affect meaning
- Check if MLA citation is correct

#### 3. Grammar

- Check for verb tense and make sure my paper is in the literary present
- Look for agreement errors (between nouns and verbs)
- Look for very long sentences and double-check if they are run-ons

#### 4. TO STRENGTHEN YOUR ARGUMENT:

*(working in pairs)*

Find a partner. Without looking at your draft, say out loud to your partner what you think your paper argues; have them take notes, recording what you've said. Do the same for your partner, taking notes while they explain their draft's argument. Next, return to your essay to see if your paper matches your partner's notes, or whether you further explained something out loud that you didn't write down. Work to revise your paper so that it matches your description.

#### 5. TO RESTRUCTURE YOUR ESSAY AND DISCOVER NEW IDEAS IN THE PROCESS:

On a computer, divide your draft into sections (you can define 'section' as a paragraph, half-paragraph, two paragraphs—any time you see a new unit of thought emerging, press the Enter key!) Then:

- **Experiment:** copy and paste the sections into a new document in a different order. Reread them in their new order, considering how your argument changes when one section comes earlier or later in the sequence. The idea is to spark new transitions and the expansion of ideas, or to reveal redundancies/problems. You might rearrange your sections:
  - At random, following your instincts
  - By grouping together sections that address a similar key term or idea closer together
  - To try and find a new logic to your argument
- **Notice and Evaluate:** does your new section order help to reduce repetitiveness? To provide crucial background information earlier in your paper? To make a connection between ideas clearer? If so, keep the new order. If not, continue moving sections, or restore them to their earlier positions.
- **Revise.** Once you've settled on a new structure, read it again, and fill in what's missing between sections.