Introduction

The Need for Revision Strategies

During Jolene's career as a writing project codirector and staff developer, she has asked thousands of teachers how they teach revision and what strategies they use to help students improve their initial drafts. At a recent workshop, thinking about our work on this book, Jolene asked the teachers to jot down their questions and comments about revision on 3 × 5 note cards. One teacher's response clearly recognizes the centrality of the revision process to good writing, while at the same time it acknowledges how difficult it is to teach revision:

> How can I teach revision effectively so my students become independent thinkers and writers?

It is this question—how to teach revision effectively, and particularly with adolescent writers—that lies at the heart of this book.

Other responses Jolene collected at the workshop reflect some common misconceptions about revision:

> How do you teach students to find mistakes?

> Where do you start to revise with some of your "worst" writers?

> How much does a student have to revise?

> How can I get students to recognize their errors?

The misconceptions these questions reveal are barriers to effective revision and are, unfortunately, prevalent in today's classrooms. They include the beliefs that

- the current atmosphere of testing does not allow for revision as part of writing instruction.
- editing and revision are the same.
- there is not enough time to teach revision and cover the rest of the curriculum.

These widely held misconceptions point to the need for teachers to gain more knowledge of and experience with the revision process and to benefit from the experiences of others. Hence this book: a collection of instructional revision strategies that teachers and

students can implement during the writing process, selecting those that best meet their needs. Some of these revision strategies are uniquely ours, while others have been adapted from or inspired by the work of prestigious teachers of writing.

The 36 strategies in this book are designed for teachers' use as they instruct students how to think through the revision process. The strategies reflect the wisdom of teachers and students who successfully use the writing process as their framework for writing, thinking, and learning, and whose classroom interactions give witness to their understanding of the recursive and dynamic process of revision. The strategies include and demonstrate teachers' use of the following practices:

- Frontloading with familiarity and ease; that is, having students plan, rehearse, and converse during the prewriting stage, which, in turn, streamlines their writing as well as their revision process.
- Having students confer with peers during writers' workshop, to help them gather more ideas to incorporate into their revisions.
- Using technology as a means to give students multiple ways to collaborate and revise in and out of the classroom.
- Modeling effective revision strategies for their students, because teachers are writers as well as teachers of writing.

This book will be useful for teachers to strengthen their repertoire of revision strategies for effective instruction; the strategies may also be internalized by their students as the students become more fluent and confident writers. The strategies are designed to be flexible so that they can be taught numerous times and in many content areas.

Revision Throughout the Writing Process

No one writes perfectly the first time, no matter how experienced the writer may be; thoughtful and meaningful revisions are a natural part of the writing process. As Donald Murray wrote, "Revision is based on re-seeing the entire piece of writing" (Murray, 1995, p. xiv).

If we want our students to be better writers, they must see the positive effects of revision in the writing process. When students experience the modeling of effective strategies, implement these strategies with guidance, and reflect on their process of revision, they gain the confidence to improve their writing.

As teachers, we are aware that writing is a highly complex, cognitive process. "In order to compose or write, students must combine all their knowledge of the topic with their knowledge of the mechanics of language" (Borgese, 1998, p. 62). In addition, students need to hone their craft and hear their own voices to create meaningful revisions that ultimately improve the quality of their writing. Craft is the process of shaping and reshaping our material into a finished product, with an ideal reader in mind. This may be a "long, painstaking, patient process" (Graves, 1983, p. 6) that a writer endures until the final product is satisfying to the writer's purpose and audience. Our students need the same strategies and writing activities to compose and revise that professional writers experience during their writing process.

In the crafting of revision, the writer must not only read what is on the page, but must anticipate what is yet to be written. Writing is thinking, and sometimes the writer discovers something new or long forgotten (Murray, 1995). We have learned from the

works of Murray and Graves that the writing process involves thinking that focuses both on the process and the product.

In the remainder of this introduction, before turning to the revision strategies themselves, we share some understandings about the writing process and revision that have grown out of many scholars' work in this field, and we share some reflections about a couple of current developments that are affecting the way we teach writing:

- The Process Approach
- Writer's Workshop
- Frontloading Activities
- The 6 Traits of Effective Writing
- Digital Communication
- The Common Core State Standards

The Process Approach

The recursive and dynamic nature of the writing process allows the writer to plan, draft, and revise, often all at the same time. The process approach, honed by Donald Graves (see Figure I.1), provides a guide for students and teachers as they develop their drafts.

When students begin with the reader in mind, writing becomes a complex mental activity. "Writing is where we learn to think" (Graves, 2004, p. 87). Putting thoughts and ideas into written words is an intellectual exercise that furthers thinking. When reading,

Figure I.1   Graves's process approach to writing and its implications for students and teachers.

The Process of Writing	*Implications for Students*	*Implications for Teachers*
Choice and rehearsal (prewriting)	Choice is motivating and empowering	Connect with our students and their interests
Composition (drafting)	Frontloading (rehearsal) gives students an opportunity to discover what they want to write	Guide students to research and choose their topics through frontloading activities
Voice (drafting)	Provides an opportunity to clarify ideas during writing	Guide students to develop organizational strategies
Conference (revising)	Write for appropriate purpose and audience	Guide students to develop their voices
Revision	Share writing with teacher and peers	Provide time for meaningful feedback
Publishing	Bring clarity to the content	Model peer revision strategies that help students to do further revision
	Share with an audience	Model strategies to enhance clarity of content
		Give the opportunity to be heard by authentic audiences

we retrieve ideas from our background knowledge to make connections and meaning. When writers use their background knowledge to create meaningful sentences, their readers interpret the meaning based on their own prior knowledge and experiences. Revision permeates the writing process but comes into play most prominently during the conference and revision stages.

Writers' Workshop

Nancie Atwell is the originator of writers' workshop, a now widely adopted practical application of the writing process for teachers and students. The workshop is where communities of writers work together to develop their skills and craft. It is during writers' workshop that students have opportunities to share their drafts with peers and rethink their writing as they prepare their final drafts for their readers.

Atwell designed writers' workshop with seven underlying principles that are listed in Figure I.2. The implementation of these principles is critical to making writers' workshop a successful and meaningful classroom practice.

Figure I.2   Atwell's seven underlying principles of writers' workshop.

Writers need regular chunks of time.

Writers need their own topics.

Writers need response.

Writers learn mechanics in context.

Writers need to know adults who write.

Writers need to read.

Writing teachers need to take responsibility for their knowledge and teaching.

Source: Atwell, 1987, pp. 17–18.

Within Atwell's writing workshop, there are four routines established: (1) the minilesson at the beginning of class, (2) writing workshop itself, where time is spent writing, (3) group share meeting during the last few minutes of class, and (4) the status-of-the-class conference, which begins after the first day. Revision strategies are often modeled by the teacher during the minilessons and practiced by the students during writing workshop time.

Frontloading

Revision actually begins before we start to write. Frontloading activities are executed during rehearsal, before any writing takes place. These activities help students to think about their ideas and how they might organize them. When frontloading is done thoughtfully, students often find that writing becomes easier, and the revisions needed are fewer.

Whereas prewriting is associated more with brainstorming ideas and details, frontloading involves selecting, prioritizing, and customizing. Frontloading activities may

include creating visuals, making graphic organizers, collecting artifacts, role-playing, or responding to music. Frontloading is more than a word association web or cluster, more than making a list. It is thinking about the topic, about how to start a piece of writing or even how to end it. The writer performs frontloading activities, with multiple prewriting strategies, to develop ideas. Incorporating frontloading activities into the writing process shortens as well as strengthens the revision process. The revision strategies in Part II of this book all involve frontloading activities.

The right variety of frontloading activities will encourage, embrace, and extend the students' thinking to help them find the right topic, identify the right spin on the assignment, and provide substantial information. Complex prompts need more frontloading activities to provide students with ample information and alternative perspectives to incorporate into their writings. Just like athletes who run plays before the game, actors who rehearse their lines for a play, and painters who draw many sketches before they decide what to paint, student writers improve their work by engaging in a variety of frontloading activities.

6 Traits of Effective Writing

The 6 Traits of Effective Writing have given teachers a common vocabulary for instructional and assessment purposes. Using the results of Paul Diederich's research on the language of writing instruction and assessment, the 6 Traits model was developed in 1984 by a team of 17 teachers in Beaverton, Oregon, working under the direction of Vicki Spandel. Carol Meyer helped Vicki coordinate the team as director of assessment and evaluation for the Beaverton School District; she pulled the original team together and organized all the subsequent training of teachers that enabled us to field test the model with 5,000 Beaverton students while Vicki Spandel served as the scoring director.

The research model used in the development process was derived primarily from the work of Paul Diederich (*Measuring Growth in English,* 1974), and also from the work of Donald Murray (1982), who believed in and promoted a system of identifying the traits that make writing work in order to improve students' revision. His traits paralleled the 6 Traits very closely and both Diederich's and Murray's research inspired the development of the 6 Traits.

Many states have since integrated the 6 Traits of effective writing into their state frameworks. The revision strategies we offer are rooted in one or more of the 6 Traits of effective writing; their common language makes both teachers and students more confident when teaching, discussing, and assessing revision.

The 6 Traits and the writing process intersect and overlap as the semantic feature analysis chart shows in Figure I.3. As Culham points out, it is important that students be taught and understand the vocabulary that explains the writing process and that distinguishes revision from editing: "When . . . working with the idea, shaping it, rethinking it, and moving it forward . . . use the term *revision*. When . . . talking about cleaning up the text the way a copy editor would, then use the term *editing*" (2003, p. 25). When students are going through the revision process, they are attending to 5 of the 6 Traits (everything but the conventions that come into play during the editing process): ideas, organization, voice, word choice, and sentence fluency. It is essential to teach, model, and practice these traits of effective writing as students develop their drafts.

During the revision process, writers

- develop their ideas with interesting and important details.
- organize their drafts clearly and effectively.
- establish a voice that is a perfect match for their audience and purpose.
- use the most interesting and accurate words.
- construct phrases and **sentences** that enhance the intended meaning (Culham, 2003, p. 23).

Figure I.3   Connecting the writing process and the 6 Traits.

Writing Process/6 Traits	Ideas	Organization	Voice	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Conventions
Prewrite	•	•				
Draft	•	•	•			
Revision	•	•	•	•	•	
Edit						•

Source: greatsource.com/iwrite.

Because the 6 Traits are research-based and offer best practices for effective writing instruction, the revision strategies in this text have been correlated with the 6 Traits. On the first page of each part of the book, there is a chart that indicates which of the 6 Traits are involved in each of the strategies within that part.

Traits and Revision

The primary purpose of introducing the 6 Traits into the classroom is to strengthen revision—and editing skills. The first five traits—ideas, organization, voice, word choice, and sentence fluency—have traditionally been most closely connected with revision because, if you look closely at the top levels of any good writing guide, you see the very things writers do when they revise. They add detail or cut filler, reorder information or write a new lead, spice up voice, refine word choice, recraft sentences to smooth the flow. When we teach students the traits, we open a world of revision possibilities. The sixth trait, conventions, has always been linked to editing. After all, copy editors check punctuation, grammar and usage, spelling, and capitalization. Recent thinking has transformed this perspective in two ways.

First, conventions now also incorporate presentation: the layout within a written document—like a picture book or newspaper, or the style and overall flow of nontextual communication—such as a PowerPoint presentation or video. Second, with this expanded definition of conventions comes an understanding that conventions are not just about correctness; they also create and enhance both meaning and voice. To cite a few simple examples, think how paragraphing supports organization, how spelling clarifies word choice, how punctuation and italics show readers how to interpret dialogue. Because conventions do so much to support all the other traits, we are recognizing increasingly that editing has a role to play within the larger sphere of revision.

At the same time, we want students to make a distinction. Too many students see editing not as an integral part of revision, but as the whole of revision. This means they may correct spelling and insert missing punctuation and believe they have "revised" their work—when in fact they've barely touched the surface. We want to take students well beyond surface changes, giving them the skills they need to make big revisions: adding new information or beginning in a different way. In exploring such strategies, we'll be emphasizing the first five of the six traits and showing many connections to those five. But keep in mind that editing (tweaking conventions) or design (revamping the layout or presentation) can and will enhance any revision.

Source: Personal interview with Vicki Spandel, August 16, 2011.

Peer Response

Peer response helps students become more independent revisers. Whether reading, writing, speaking, or listening, all students are actively engaged during peer response in helping their fellow writers create better drafts, and in the process they develop a collection of strategies about how to respond to a text. Through playing the roles of writer, reader, and audience, students use critical reading, listening, and thinking skills as well as manners and empathy to fully respond to their peers' drafts. Writers have an audience to read to, an audience has the writers to respond to, and when combined, this peer conferencing process is an effective approach to guide writers through the revision process.

Digital Communication

The classroom is a place where tradition meets the latest innovative technology. Some districts are equipped with the latest computers, whiteboards, iPads, and document cameras; others have none of these technology tools. Even where these tools are available, some teachers fear the new and unknown and need professional development to understand it; others, often the digital natives among us, embrace the tools of digital communication that can motivate students and enhance their research, writing, and presenting skills.

Digital communication has made revision a much speedier and more efficient process. Adding information, removing information, moving information, or being more specific is as easy as a click on a keyboard. Because students are computer literate at such an early age, teachers need to give time and opportunities for students to compose, revise, and edit on the computer. There are many websites and programs that support students during the revision process. "The bottom line is that digital writing tools such as blogs, wikis, and collaborative word processors can enhance the writer's workshop" (Hicks, 2009, p. 36). The strategies in Part VII of this book sample the potential of some of these tools, demonstrating how they can be used effectively in the revision process.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Finally, we turn our attention to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts. These guidelines support many of the elements we have incorporated into

these chapters: the writing process, the three dominant text types, writers' workshop, peer response, and revision strategies in general. The CCSS acknowledge that components of the writing process—such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing—are applicable to the three text types in which students need to become proficient: narrative, information/explanatory, and argument. The major shift in CCSS with regard to writing is from persuasive text to the argument. In Part I of this book, revision strategies that incorporate frontloading activities, such as *Create an Argument*, provide students with a focused way to examine information that supports their positions. Teachers need to instruct students on how to create an argument that changes the reader's point of view, brings about some action on the reader's part, or asks the reader to accept a writer's explanation or evaluation of a concept, issue, or problem.

The CCSS writing standards for Grades 6–12 specify that students must "produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience" (www.corestandards.org). Part II of this book contains revision strategies that focus on ideas. By implementing these strategies, students strengthen ideas that are weak or underdeveloped in their drafts. The revision strategies in Part III address the organization of a draft. Part IV focuses on voice, word choice, and sentence fluency.

The CCSS language supports direct instruction of revision strategies and peer response during writers' workshop, stating that "with some guidance and support from peers and adults, students need to develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing" (www.corestandards.org). Part V contains revision strategies that are fostered through peer conferences. Part VI offers strategies that rely on quality young adult literature to serve as mentor texts for examples and models that can be incorporated into students' writing.

The CCSS encourage "*the use of technology to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others*" (www.corestandards.org). The revision strategies in Part VII all incorporate digital communication. Students are adept at composing and revising on the computer, and there are many programs available to help students through the revision process. Realizing there are a plethora of sites available, we have featured as examples a few that have worked the best with our students.