

As a parting thought, some feedback that would be helpful from other readers would be the issue of clarity and style. I feel as though my initial draft had more “prose poetry” in it and this subsequent draft is more “essay-ish.” Does it water down my first thoughts or help to clarify them? What areas seem to give an “aha” response (felt sense, right?) and what areas make you sort of wince? Any areas where you doze off? Does the spiritual tone become a religious tone at any point? Your ideas are most welcome.

Sincerely,  
Beth

## Three Levels of Revising

For purposes of the main assignment in this workshop, we are going to think of revision as **any stage that occurs after you have a complete piece**, though—as we’ve already said—revision usually occurs at **all** stages of the writing process.

Many students equate revision with correcting mechanics or copyediting. Experienced writers never confuse the two. For them, revision means **entering into a conversation with their previous thoughts**. They match what they have already written against what they now wish to say and create out of the two a new piece that suits their present purpose. For example, now that we’re revising this textbook for a second time, we are aware of the need to include instructions for using electronic media. That awareness has generated the need to revise, not just add. What our premises imply is that **revision never stops**. But of course writers need to finish things for particular deadlines, and so they revise what they have and submit it—usually with the recognition that if they submitted it later, they’d make additional changes.

Since this is how revision actually works, no one can say exactly what revising is. Probably the best definition is that revising is **whatever you do to improve a piece of writing in terms of getting closer to what you want to say to a particular reader or readers—**whoever they may be (e.g., friends, colleagues, an editor at a publishing house, the general reading public of a particular publication, a teacher, or even oneself). But to help us talk about revision, we’re going to distinguish three levels:

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.”

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1. *Reseeing or rethinking: changing the bones.* When you read over something you've written, you often realize that it doesn't say what you now want it to say. **You now see you were wrong, or you've changed your mind, or you need more, or you left something out, or you didn't understand the full implications of what you were saying.** The process of writing and rereading changes you. At its most extreme, this level of revising may mean that you crumple up what you've written and aim it toward the trash basket: The cartoon image of a writer surrounded by wads of discarded paper is not far from the truth. Most writers feel they have to discard lots before they come up with something they can use. When *A Community of Writers* first came out, Workshop 5, which is now all about collaboration—using the loop process and the collage as methods—had no mention of collaboration. It was only about the loop process. As we were revising, we mentioned collaboration only briefly. In the intervening years we got more and more interested in collaboration. Consequently, we added a whole new Workshop, Workshop 4, on collaborative writing.

2. *Reworking or reshaping: changing the muscles.* This second level of revising means that you're satisfied with what you are saying (or trying to say) but not with how you've said it. Working on "how" tends to mean thinking about readers: **thinking about how your thoughts will be read or understood by people other than yourself.** Thus feedback from readers is particularly useful for this level of revising. One of the most common kinds of reworking is to **improve clarity.** Sometimes this may mean adding clarifying sentences or transitions—or even whole paragraphs. Perhaps you realize you need to change the order you present things in; or you need an introduction, conclusion, and some transitions; or you've implied ideas or suggested attitudes that you now consider unnecessary.\* Most common of all,

\* In the reworking level of revising this book, we found ourselves giving a good deal of attention to the subtitles scattered throughout the workshops: adding some and clarifying many. Having finally figured out what we were trying to say—where we were going—we were now trying to improve the road signs others would try to follow.

## Exploring the Writing Process

### *On Changing Your Mind*

I just figured out that all this stuff about revising is simply "man-talk" for changing your mind—which I

have done and been made fun of for my whole life.

**Andrea Warren**

you simply need to leave out parts that may be OK in themselves (or even precious to you) but that don't quite belong now that you've finally figured out what the piece of writing is really saying. These passages clog your piece and will distract or tire readers. (You may not believe we left out a lot of the first draft of this book, but we did.)

3. *Copyediting or proofreading: changing the skin.* This third level of revising is usually what you do right before you hand something in or send it to its most important readers. At its simplest, it means **finding typographical errors**. At a level slightly above that, it means fixing **sentence structure and checking spelling, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, and other features of usage**. The spellchecker on your computer can help, but be careful about pairs such as *their/there* and noun and verb endings such as *s/ed*. Your spellchecker won't pinpoint these for you.

A writer needs to do all three kinds of revising and ideally in the order we've described them. After all, there's no point in fixing the spelling of a word or the style of a sentence if you're going to cut it, and no point struggling to reword the presentation of an idea until you know you're going to keep it. But of course writing activities don't always stay in a neat order. Sometimes it's not until you rework the presentation of an idea that you realize that it needs to be cut.

Beth Spencer continued revising and editing "The Act of Writing as Prayer," which you've already seen in several stages. The *latest* draft of her essay appears here:

### The Act of Writing as Prayer *Beth Spencer*

I am beginning to see the act of writing as prayer. Just a few months ago I sat before three professors, each of whom held a copy of my collected poems in their laps, asking me to explain both the genesis and evolution of my poetry to date. I will never forget the way they looked over their respective bifocals at me: one with a half-grin, one with a mock-sowl, and the other with the unabashed delight beaming on his face. There, in that 15 × 25 foot cinderblock office, I recounted how writing had taken hold of me at a young age, the sins of omission and commission admitted through poetic language, and always, always how the act of writing *transported* me beyond my physical body. I tried to explain that it was not so much the words, but the space between the words that compelled me beyond the hard swivel chair and bad lighting to a place which both exhilarated and humbled my spirit. The act of writing, for me, then becomes that silent space of fear and perfect clarity.

I once remember battling a deep resentment towards a person who

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## The Act of Writing as Prayer *continued*

had probably brought the most pain to my life. I was caught in a thicket of brambles, playing this resentment over and over in my mind. I wanted a way out, wanted to free myself of the barbs that clung to me. The more I resisted, though, the more desperately entangled I became. I forced myself to pray for the person every day for two weeks. I submitted myself to the process, against my better judgment. At first, I remember praying: *please, God, give that sonofabitch what he deserves*. Each day, I prayed a similar sentiment. And each day the words became less and less powerful—revealing that, to my surprise, they were not the truth of my spirit or of my Creator's spirit. By the last few days the prayer changed to *God, bless this person with peace and abundance. I now see, too, that they are as trapped and fearful as I have been*. Again, thinking I knew the truth about a person was changed through prayer. Writing, for me, has the same effect.

Every time I hover above my journal, scrawl a thought on a restaurant napkin or tap out clumps of phrases onto my keyboard, I am submitting myself to an uncomfortable process. Writing demands that I abandon the notion that I am the source of all creation. I dab words onto the page in fear that I really don't understand what will overtake the process. Journals, lists, couplets, and clusters of words are my markings against a white surface that are like little fists clasped together and pressed to my forehead. They plead with the universe to *show me, show me the way*. Not knowing where I'm going makes the shock of clarity that much more exhilarating. When I am writing, I am pushing against the notion of what I think I know. In the stillness of the morning, I may be moved to reach for my pen and describe the beauty of migratory birds: *I have one rose-breasted grosbeak and eight indigo buntings at the feeder. Where will they light next? Will they make the journey back to Central and South America?* At night I fall into sleep scrawling: *a china moon a straw hat and deacons and jackals everywhere. Oh set the coffee maker in the morning. I wish that . . . [sleep]*. My language always knows where it's going; my hand does not.

Prayer, too, requires that I simply submit myself to a process and trust that it will guide me into a deeper sense of understanding. It insists that I pay attention to that stillness of the morning and wait for a nudge. A nudge of clarity at first, and nothing more. *God, I think. I do not do not understand your will for me right now. You know me, God, you know me. You know that I need big arrows. Wide maps. Bright colors. I am here. Show me*. Then, when I least expect it, a nudge—no, a push—that moves me from one place to another in my mind; a feeling of powerlessness until I engage in prayer and feel how it transforms me in ways I could never imagine.

Above all, prayer is humble. Prayer keeps me striving for humility just as writing does. Both prayer and writing are a negotiation between humility and ego. I'm not the best at that—I have a tendency to think I have all the answers. And then there are times when I think I know nothing. And,

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## The Act of Writing as Prayer *continued*

ultimately all I really do know is *nothing* and that is what writing, like prayer, reveals as we go along. It reveals nothing new under the sun and, at the same time, it reveals everything. Revelations about human nature, ourselves, the way our minds work, our prejudices—yes, our prejudices—those wonderful stopgaps that really get us to the door of mystery. I recently found myself thinking a first line of poetry such as “The houses coil together in my mind / the framed yards, bald patches, places marked / with a single acorn” was the most perfect opening to a poem. In fact, I thought, *this is really pretty outstanding. Brilliant, perhaps. How I love it when it comes this easy.* And then I let it sit for a few days—*perhaps* let another pair of eyes take a look at it. And, thank goodness, my focus begins to sharpen. Umm . . . maybe that first line is a bit overstated. No, I was wrong. It’s *quite* overstated, although I do genuinely feel that the second and third lines give some nice, clean visual images. I’ll let them stay for now. Writing through my prejudices, if done long enough, will ultimately paint me into a corner, pull the rug out from under me and *force me to see things differently*. If I can remember that my writing is fed by a dialogue with the God of my understanding, The Spirit, The Muse—whatever you want to call it—I will be able to smile and laugh a little at myself when I move into that shock of clarity: mystery.

Writing and prayer, for me, are connected through mystery. Mystery is what churns the universe around. What’s tricky about this connective tissue between writing and prayer is that it is the incentive that gets me *to the keyboard, on my knees, drawing the breath and saying o.k. I really want to enter into this. I’m going to “strap in and close my eyes.”* Mystery is the one thing that drives me beyond the fear. Writing, like prayer, only reveals a truth to the writer who is ready, who is putting herself out there with a conviction of faith that constantly pushes through the formidable fear. Fear of being misunderstood. Fear of inarticulateness. Fear of looking and sounding stupid. Trusting and not trusting the muse—moments of weakness where the voice of the potential reader is louder than the voice of The Creator. Fear that someone will take your thoughts and words and twist them into something they were never meant to be, taking the beauty of being vulnerable to the creative process and destroying it with an unmovable, arrogant heart.

It is the physical act of going into the unknown that, for me, is getting down on my knees and humbling myself at the foot of the bed first thing in the morning. It is sitting in a half-lotus trying to follow my breath. It is letting the trains of thought barrel past me until I am receptive to my breath alone. I am transported away from the clamor of my daily life and into the presence of what churns the universe around. And it seems, without fail, that once I reach that place where the pen takes on a life of its own I cannot imagine wanting to be anywhere else again. I come away from each session thinking *why did I resist? I am intrigued by what is before me. Tomorrow I will unravel it some more.*

## MAIN ASSIGNMENT

### Revising on All Three Levels

Choose a piece of writing that you want to revise at all three levels. It probably makes the most sense to pick something that you feel dissatisfied with so that you know you won't mind doing extensive work on it.

There are two principal resources for good revision: time and new eyes. The best source of new eyes is other people; but if you let time go by, you've changed since you did your last draft, so in a sense your eyes are different. You don't see things the same way any longer. This is why it's so important to try to put something aside for a while and **do your serious reviewing after a week or more has passed**. This is why we've arranged this text so that you revise something a week or more after you first explored and wrote it.

#### *Step One: First-Level Revising—Reseeing, Rethinking, or Changing the Bones*

Share your piece with your group and use them to help you discover aspects of your subject that you have neglected, or explore possible major revisions: ways in which you might change your mind or disagree with your earlier draft or reach different conclusions. Or perhaps it's a descriptive piece or story, and you want to change the whole approach. Here are two suggestions to guide your group work:

1. When you've finished reading your piece (before oral discussion), allow a few minutes for freewriting. You can write down any additional thoughts you have on your topic or story, any doubts you now have about what you've written—anything at all about what the piece says. Those who have been listening to you should simply pretend that they've been assigned your subject and write their thoughts about it. At the end of this freewriting period, each group member can read what he's written. All this can serve as starters for discussion, but since this is your paper, you should guide the discussion and follow up on what is particularly interesting to you. (The others will have this same chance to be in charge when they read their papers.) You may want to ask your group members to give you copies of what they've written so that you can reread them at your leisure.

2. Another way to approach this level of revision is to ask each group member (including yourself) to pick out the most interesting sentences and freewrite about why they are interesting, what they

mean, and so forth. For this exercise you'll have to read your paper twice to your group, but reading twice is always a good idea. (It's best not to provide copies for your group since you want them to focus on your ideas, not on specific wording.) While doing this, it isn't necessary or even advisable for any of you to try to stick to your main idea. Remember, you're trying to explore all aspects of a topic no matter how unrelated they might seem at first.

Revision for the sake of revision can be a deadening chore. That's why we ask you to practice first-level revision as a pretending game. Joining the game with your classmates may lead you to new insights about your subject that you'll want to incorporate into your writing. (Of course, you don't need the game if you discover you actually do see your subject differently.)

On the basis of your group's discussion, decide what you now want to say and then rewrite your paper. Don't be surprised if you find yourself doing more revising than you expected. You may even discard the ideas you started to revise with. That's part of what should happen.

If you find this difficult—for example, if you find you don't want to change what you've said or what the story deals with—do some experimenting anyway. Play with your ideas or story. Revision is usually done in the spirit of clenched teeth and duty, but it can be done better in a spirit of play or even fooling around. The most reliable (and enjoyable) technique for changing the bones of your writing is to role-play. Pretend to be someone else who has a different outlook on your topic or issue: one of your group members, perhaps, who disagrees with you, someone else you know, or even an imagined person.

Another technique is to pick a paragraph (or even a sentence or image) and build a whole new essay or story around it. In other words, deliberately try to write something different even if you're satisfied with what your original piece says. It helps to start with a fresh sheet of paper or a new computer file to free you from the original way you developed your ideas.

If you give yourself half a chance, you can get caught up in this kind of play. The words you produce will create their own complex of ideas, which in turn will lead to other words, sentences, and paragraphs.

Let the process change your mind-set so that you are no longer striving to write something different from the original version; you're working toward fulfilling some new goal or purpose, one that has grown out of the writing itself.

We know that much revision in the working world is probably reworking, not reseeing. If your boss tells you to write a report about

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a meeting of a special planning group, you can hardly revise it into suggestions for improving company management (even if that's what you'd rather write). Still, if you learn that you don't have to stick slavishly to what you've already written, you can free yourself to use the first drafts as seeds rather than constraints. There are always deadlines, of course, so at some point we have to stop new thinking about our subject and focus instead on refining what we've already said. **We think that most students, however, get to this second step too soon; they don't recognize the power and pleasure of the prior step.** That

## Exploring the Writing Process

### *On Discovering Ideas*

I've just written and revised a paper about freewriting I was writing for a conference.

I procrastinated, as I always do, waiting for special inspiration—it didn't come (usually it doesn't). So I forced it, felt like I was stammering on paper. After 10 minutes, though, I was rolling.

After about 30 minutes of this nonstop writing, I had a good amount of stuff on paper, although I still wasn't particularly pleased with what I had come up with. Still, I had to get it done, so I started working with it. As I did that, more and more came out. Soon I had a rough draft of my paper. But I didn't particularly like it, so I fiddled with it some more. Since I had agreed to read it at a get-together of a group of us who meet about once a month to work on our writing, I had to get it in some sort of presentable form.

I told everyone before I started reading it that it sort of did what I

wanted it to do; I just didn't think it did it very well. After I finished reading, the members of the group started talking about the ideas in it—not criticizing anything and not giving me many suggestions, just talking about it.

As I drove home that night, it came to me—I knew what I had to do. I had to reorganize, present what I wanted to say as a story of an intellectual quest, what started me on the quest, what I found along the way, and what I concluded when I finished the quest. I don't know why I hadn't seen this before, but I hadn't. Something about sitting in the group and reading it, hearing it discussed a bit, made it (my text) into an object I could look at from a greater distance and shape in a more logical way. The next day I made these revisions with very little effort.

**Pat Belanoff**



is why, in this workshop, we require you to do first-level revision even if you are satisfied with what you've already written.

Once you've made your revision, you can decide whether you want to use it or your original for the remainder of the work in this workshop. Remember: Revisions aren't necessarily better—they're different. Once you understand this, you'll be willing to take risks as you revise: changing everything almost totally, exploring something which seems at first odd or silly to you, trying new approaches, developing some ideas that you don't even agree with. You can throw it all away if you want to. Almost invariably, though, you discover something substantial that you like—something that you'll want to incorporate into your original. Whatever happens, there's no reason to use a revision simply because it's a revision. And you may now decide you've got two pieces you want to finish up.

### *Step Two: Second-Level Revising—Reworking, Reshaping, or Changing the Muscles*

When you've decided which version of your essay to use, you're ready to practice the second level of revision—reworking. For this, prepare a good legible copy of the version you've selected and use very wide left- or right-hand margins—say, about three inches. Make copies for your group. Before going to class, write a brief paragraph just for yourself that states briefly your purpose for writing the paper and the reasons why you chose to accomplish your overall purpose in the way you did. (Workshop 6 focuses more on purpose as the guiding principle of revision.) Then, on your copy of the essay, write in the margin some notes about each paragraph. **These notes should include a *summary* of what the paragraph says and does (its purpose) and how it fits in where it is.** These subsidiary purposes can include introducing, restating, giving examples, setting a scene, building suspense, giving your opinion(s), describing, moving to another aspect of your paper, concluding, and so forth. (See "Skeleton Feedback and Descriptive Outline" in "Sharing and Responding" for more about this powerful activity.)

Here's how one student writer summarized the purpose of a paper she planned to revise at the second level:

I wanted to make readers see the disco scene, so I described it.  
But I also wanted to show how silly it is—poke fun at the people  
in it.

And here are the marginal summaries she wrote about the first few paragraphs of her essay. Notice that she had already begun to think of possible changes:

Outside the crowd waits. Guys clad in their outermost layer of skins, their pants, are nervously looking for their ID's within their wallets. Of course they make sure every girl sees the big wad of bills. What they don't know is that there is always a girl in the crowd who decides to light a cigarette and upon doing this sees that the big wad of bills is in fact one dollar bills. News travels fast and soon everyone is laughing at the guys. Then there are the young enticing girls. They look about 20 with their makeup caked upon their faces (you'd need a Brillo pad to scrub it all off), skin-tight Spandex and heels. These "women" are in actuality 14 or 15 years old; what gives them away is the way they smoke. They simply don't inhale. The drag of smoke enters and exits in the same dense cloud; they need to fan the air with their hands so as not to die of suffocation.

The tension is building, and it seems to hang in the air like a low-lying cloud. The people are moving closer and closer to the entrance as if stalking prey. The doors open and everyone pushes in. Suddenly a pink Cadillac screeches to a halt and the driver gets out. The multitude of people stop! It's as if a spell were cast upon them. "It's him!" a young girl cries.

He is tall, dark, and rich! He is wearing a white suit (polyester of course) with a black silk shirt. His shirt was, of course, opened to his navel in order to display his jewelry. The jewelry consisted of three rope chains, each varying in length and width, and the fourth was an inch-thick rope chain bearing the Italian phallic symbol, the horn. The crowd, still mystified, parted like the Red Sea, allowing Mr. Big to enter the disco. The two-ton bouncers who were once mountains of malice became little pups when greeting him. "Can I help you,

Introducing, setting the scene, describing people.

Also trying to set the tone—being sarcastic. I'd like readers to wonder what's going to happen.

Showing what happens right before the doors open, trying to get suspense going.

Paragraph introduces Mr. Big—sarcastic about him too.

Describes and makes fun of Mr. Big. Moves the story ahead a bit.

Shows how people react to him and how phony everything is.

Mr. Big?" "Your table is waiting for you, Mr. Big." "You look very nice today, Mr. Big," and so on.

Once that awesome happening settled and passed, the crowd went back to pushing and shoving through the doors. It's really ridiculous to see people who are supposed to be grown-ups react like little children when they see a circus for the first time. If they only realized that the circus they're watching (Mr. Big) gets his ears boxed by his mother if he comes home too late.

Once inside, the eardrums shatter like a drinking glass does when it encounters a high-pitched voice. This calamity happens because of the booming music that seems to vibrate the entire building. Ah, there's Mr. Big and his harem. All the women flock around him as if he were a mirror. He'll make his grand entrance on the dance floor later on.

Upon entering, the bar is to the left, and a few steps below is the dance floor. By the way, the steps are notorious killers since many, under the influence of alcohol, forget they exist. On the other side there is the seating area consisting of dozens of tables and black velvet, cushiony, recliner-type chairs. They are the type of chairs you lose yourself in.

Ask your group members to write the same kind of marginal notes on their copies of your essay. Also ask them to **jot down a few words specifying any emotional reaction they may have to each paragraph:** Are they curious, bored, annoyed, offended, excited, informed, hostile, or something else, and can they pinpoint the words or phrases that cause their reactions? They can do all this at home or in class. If this work is done at home, your teacher will probably give you some time in class to share and get clarification.

*Gives my opinion about all this, although I'm not sure why I put it here— maybe because I'm now going to move the scene inside.*

*Describing the scene inside, including Mr. Big. I'm making fun of the women who hang around him. I want to describe everything step by step as people would see it when they went in.*

*This is more description of the inside. The thing about the steps is something I always think about when I look down at the dance floor because I fell on them once. Maybe this should all be added to the paragraph before since it's all description.*

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Using the feedback you've gotten, decide what changes, if any, you want to make. Most of your changes will probably be aimed at **making your meaning clearer**. This can include *restructuring* (re-ordering paragraphs, adding transitions, providing or reworking introductions and conclusions), rewriting (reworking sentences or phrases to alter their emotional impact or clarify their meaning), and *adding* (everything from background information to new points, to examples, to clarifying phrases). If, while doing this, you find yourself moving back to the first level of revision (altering what you say), don't be surprised. We told you that **the three levels of revision cannot be fully compartmentalized**. You need to keep in mind, too, that form and content are inextricably linked: Changing *how* something is said almost always affects *what* is said.

One final note about this level of revising. Your paper is yours, and you need to trust your own instincts about how you say something. We think that before ideas get into words, there is always an impulse toward meaning, a felt sense. Once we put an idea into

## Exploring the Writing Process

### *On Revising With Scissors and Tape*

#### Exploring the Writing Process

Thank you for reading my "rough" (sure took a lot of work to produce something so unfinished—on the computer I lose track of how many drafts I've gone through). When I tried breaking up the exposition, as you suggested, I discovered the need to equally break up the narrative. Then I became more aware of the importance of linking particular episodes with specific discussions (and also discovered a lot of redundancy). I ended up doing a lot of literal cutting and pasting: printed up the whole article, cut it up almost by paragraphs, and then rearranged and taped things together. So I

ended up moving from computer back to a physical scroll. (I know the writing process is supposed to be recursive, but doesn't this sound positively retrogressive?) I've never produced anything quite this way before, and I honestly hope that future articles won't be so emotionally demanding. I think I'd now like to tackle some "safe," comparatively dull piece of literary analysis.

**Deborah Klein,  
University of Jos, Nigeria**

Note: This is the writer's observation after completing a revision of an article that appears in the November 1999 issue of *College English*.



Figure 5 Revision: Start to Finish

words, we test it against that original impulse; and when the words and the impulse match, we know we've got the idea right for ourselves. Sometimes this felt sense of rightness comes immediately;

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sometimes we have to rewrite several times before we feel it; and sometimes we just give up and recognize that, for the moment, we can't achieve it. Our point is that only you know exactly when you've said what you want to say. Someone else may suggest a very nice sentence, but it's no good if it's not what you are trying to say.

### *Step Three: Third-Level Revising—Copyediting and Proofreading*

When you've finished this second level of revision, type up a final, clean copy of your paper—double- or even triple-spaced. This can be the copy you hand in to your teacher. Make at least two copies of this almost-final version. You will use the extra copies for copyediting and proofreading, the final level of revision.

Your teacher might not be able to provide time in class for you to proofread and copyedit every paper you hand in. But you should find the time for it. Typographical and usage errors can destroy the best piece of writing; once you've spent a lot of time getting your thoughts straight and in good order, it's foolish not to take a little extra time to make them readable. Surface flubs can make readers decide not to read your piece at all or to read it in a hostile mood.

You will benefit tremendously from the comments of your fellow students here. If your teacher sets aside class time for this activity, proceed as below:

1. Make two copies of the almost-final version of your paper. Give one copy to another student, asking her to copyedit and proofread your paper, and doing the same for her.
2. Read your classmate's paper very carefully, and pencil in any corrections you think appropriate. You are looking for errors in mechanics or typing (capitalization, underlining, abbreviations, and so forth) and all violations of the rules of Standard English. You'll particularly want to check spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, and pronoun reference. If you aren't sure about a change you've made, put a question mark by it. If a sentence doesn't sound right to you—and you can't pinpoint exactly what's bothering you—draw wiggly lines under it. Be sure to sign your name to the paper as editor. Your teacher may want to collect all edited copies of each paper in order to pinpoint particular students' problems.
3. Once you get the copies of your paper back, you'll need to make a decision about each correction or comment made by your editor(s). If you're sure they're right (perhaps your mistake was

carelessness or poor typing), make the correction neatly in ink on your good copy. If you're sure they're wrong, don't erase the change; leave it, so that your teacher will know what you've made a decision about. If you're not sure one way or the other, you'll have to check with some third-party authority: a handbook, your teacher, a tutor in the writing center, or a proficient classmate, roommate, or family member.

4. If your teacher gives you additional class time, you can share your findings and problems with others in the class. All of us store rules about language in our heads, even though we may not be consciously aware of them. If we didn't have such rules, we couldn't talk or write at all. If you can become consciously aware of the rules you use, you can discard or alter those that are unacceptable (as defined by your teacher or the grammar book you are using) and sharpen those that are valid. Class discussion will make you aware of which you should keep and which you should discard.

If you do not have time for this activity in class, you may be able to make arrangements with classmates to do it outside of class. Otherwise, ask your roommate, a friend, or a family member. You can even hire a tutor to help.

You can also copyedit and proofread productively on your own, of course. Sometimes the best strategy for dealing with problems you can't clearly define is to rewrite the problem sentence in a different way. Try to think yourself back into the idea you had when you wrote the sentence, and see if you can write it in a way that matches your idea more clearly. Say what you mean aloud to yourself, talk it through, and then try writing it again. **You may want to rewrite the sentence several ways.** You'll probably recognize which one is the best. If you do rewrite an entire sentence, you should reread the paragraph it's in to make sure you haven't disrupted the flow of the ideas and language. If, when you've made decisions about all suggested changes, you discover you've made so many that it's hard to read your paper, ask your teacher if she'd like you to retype it or make the changes on your computer and reprint the paper. If you have to retype it, remember it needs proofreading again. (This is one of the many advantages of writing on a computer.)

If you make a relatively high number of usage errors, you'll need to do some extra work. **Set aside several pages in your journal or notebook to list the errors you make. In this way, you can discover which errors recur and concentrate on avoiding them.** What you'll probably discover is that you're not making many different errors, but the same errors over and over. Your teacher may expect you to do some extra work to begin clearing up your particular set of errors.

## Suggestions for Collaboration

You might want to switch papers with a classmate at each level of revision, then switch back, and compare notes on what recommendations you've both made. The final—or latest—draft should be produced *collaboratively*, incorporating the revisions you've decided jointly to implement.

## Sharing and Responding

A major portion of the activity in this workshop already involves sharing your writing with your peers and receiving and making responses. Your classmates have already undertaken a version of “Believing and Doubting” during the first level of revision. They pretended your topic was theirs. In the second level of revision, you and your classmates have provided a kind of “Descriptive Outline” in the margins of papers. The other sharing-and-responding activity that we recommend for this workshop is “What Is Almost Said?” You will find it useful to ask your classmates this question as you're working through the first and second levels of revising.

## Process Journal and Cover Letter

You've probably done some process writing in previous workshops about the revising you did there. But since we haven't until now made revising the focus of a workshop, it's important to try to learn as much as you can about what happens for you in this slippery process. Try to re-create and describe as much as you can of what you did in all the revising activities of this workshop: feelings, thoughts, reactions, things you can learn. If you need help, these prompts may be of use:

- Simply gather as many memories and reactions as you can under the three stages:
  - First-level revising of bones, or what you said.
  - Second-level revising of muscles, or how you said it.
  - Third-level, skin-deep copyediting or proofreading.
- Freewrite about your own revision processes in the past and about how you feel about revision. Do you revise a great deal? If so, why? What writings of your own are you the most reluctant to revise? Why? When you revise, at which level do you tend to work at most?
- At what points in your writing do you tend to stop and fix things? Are they frequent? What triggers you to stop the flow of words and go back to change something?
- Read “Ruminations and Theory: Revising and Grammar” and write in your journal about some of your experiences with grammar.



## Writing as Play

## Mechanical Revision

1. After you've finished the sequence we set forth in this workshop and have a paper ready for final submission, select one of its paragraphs that seems particularly leaden or energyless to you. Replace every form of to be in that paragraph with a verb that captures some of the action of the sentence itself.

Example: Look back at the paragraph in our sample essay (page 134) beginning "Upon entering, the bar is to the left [. . .]." Here's how that might look according to this exercise:

Upon entering, you immediately see the bar to the left, and a few steps below, the dance floor. By the way, the steps have a reputation as notorious killers since many, under the influence of alcohol, forget that they exist. A seating area consisting of dozens of tables and black velvet, cushiony, recliner-type chairs lines the other side of the dance floor. In this type of chair, you can lose yourself.

OR

2. Examine your almost completed paper, and take one of the middle paragraphs or the end paragraph and put it first. Notice what changes you have to make.

Example: Here's what might happen when the paragraph beginning "Once inside, the eardrums [. . .]" is placed first:

The eardrums shatter as a drinking glass does when it encounters a high-pitched voice. This calamity happens because of the booming that seems to vibrate the entire building. Ah, there's Mr. Big and his harem. All the women flock around him as if he were a mirror. He'll make his grand entrance on the dance floor later on.

Now that we've gotten in, the noise of the waiting crowd outside fades away, but we know the rest of them will be there most of the night. The scene out there was something else [. . .].

(Look to see what other changes you might need to make in this paragraph as well as throughout the piece.)

Since this is just a for-fun exercise, you do not actually have to rewrite your entire paper—unless of course your teacher asks you to, or, just perhaps, you might like it better this new way. Fun can be productive!

For your cover letter, it's good to include some or all of your process writing. But don't forget to answer some cover letter questions. Here are the main ones: **What is your main point and what effect are you trying to have on readers? What do you feel works best in your paper and where are you unsatisfied? What changes did you make on the basis of any feedback? And most important: What feedback do you want now from a reader?** But your teacher may ask you particular cover letter questions that pertain to this assignment.

## RUMINATIONS AND THEORY

### Revising and Grammar

Many people think that learning to write means learning grammar. When we ask students at the beginning of a semester what they expect from our course, many say they expect to be taught grammar. They rarely understand that grammar mistakes (subject-verb agreement, tense forms, sentence completeness) and deviations from standard usage (spelling, inappropriate word choices, and word forms) do not usually lead to a distortion of meaning, though, of course, they can. But **deviations from standard usage can be quite distracting for many readers.** Each of us can probably tolerate a different level of deviation. Some people can read a whole paper in which the final "s" is missing from present-tense verbs and not react. Others will react to even one missing "s."

Errors in usage often force readers into giving attention to the words instead of to the meaning. Continually distracted in this way, readers begin to believe that the author's meaning is unclear, the organization poor, or the quality of thinking mediocre. Or they'll judge the writer as not very committed to the ideas she's presenting; and if that decision reinforces itself through ongoing usage and grammar errors, readers may conclude that the writing does not merit their continued attention either.\*

\*One of the reviewers of this textbook commented (in reference to the Writing-as-Play box of this workshop) that we had overused forms of "to be" in our "Ruminations and Theory" section. As a result, we revised this paragraph. Following is the original paragraph:

The real problem with errors in usage is that they force readers into giving attention to the words instead of the meaning. If readers are continually distracted in this way, they begin to believe that the author's meaning is unclear, the organization is poor, or the quality of thinking is mediocre. Or they'll think that the writer is not very committed to the ideas she's presenting, and if that's the case, why should the reader give them much attention?