10 Best Classroom Practices

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Introduction

The Process Approach debuted during the 1970s and dramatically changed the way writing is taught. One of its most significant contributions was establishing that writing happens over time and is not a one-step phenomenon. Process Writing put the "re" into writing, showing that re-thinking, re-envisioning, re-organizing, and re-writing are essential and integral parts of writing well. Although Process Writing has traditionally been presented as linear, its recursive "re" nature reveals its cyclical nature. The past thirty years have brought modifications and evolutions to the Process Approach, but many of its central premises and practices remain with us today in large part because they offer writers useful strategies. Practices such as developing a paper over time in multiple drafts and peer workshops are widely accepted and implemented in teaching writing from elementary school through college. This chapter explores some of those time-tested practices, suggests ways writers and teachers can implement them, and highlights the collaborative nature of the revision process.

Despite the widespread acceptance of the need for revision, most beginning writers resist rewriting. Indeed, in his book *The Craft of Revision,* Donald M. Murray makes the point that "any suggestion for a change in a draft is a personal insult" (2). Our writing, he goes on to say, reveals to the world what we know and what we don't know, how we think and how we feel. When we write, and when others read what we have written, we feel exposed and vulnerable. Is it any wonder, then, that inexperienced writers often are the most resistant to the idea of revision? Lacking in skills, knowledge, and self-confidence, beginning writers, or those individuals who perceive themselves as poor

writers, think of revision a punishment for not getting it right the first time. The task for instructors is to find ways to break down these barriers, to help *all* writers see revision as an opportunity to uncover what it is they really want to say, and to discover new ways to say it. Revision is, as Wendy Bishop states, a chance to "re-see, review, re-envision, and re-fashion our work" (313).

As I poured through the books, articles, and case studies that dealt with the subject of revision and talked with colleagues about how they use revision in the classroom, I found the possible approaches and methods for revision to be staggering. Looking for those "best practices" in revision proved to be a daunting task, indeed. What I did find was that as varied as the methods and theories were the common denominator was that they all encouraged a collaborative approach. The authoritative method—where the teacher functions as judge and jury, and where students write in isolation, turn in papers for those inevitable red markings and grades, and then move on to the next writing assignment—is no longer in fashion. Instead, the writing process is really best described as the *revision process.* Students are encouraged to talk about their work-in-progress with peers, tutors, and teachers throughout the process, from generating ideas, through the development stage, to the final draft. Students share their writing with other students as well as with their teachers in formal and informal conversations about writing that can be heard and seen in classrooms, in writing centers, in offices, and online.

For this chapter I have chosen a sampling of current representative methods for revising papers. I have divided this chapter into four main categories: Peer Review, Writing Centers and Other Writing Support Programs, Portfolios, and Teacher and Student Conferences. At the end of this chapter there are also training exercises that my colleagues and I have used to prepare our students for peer review. This is by no means an exhaustive list of revision strategies, but it does illustrate some of today's most forward thinking, and, I hope, useful information. Throughout, the aim has been to help teachers help students gain control of their writing by making intelligent decisions when they are revising their own papers.

Peer Review

Peer review can be a beneficial approach in encouraging students to look at their writing and to consider ways they might revise what they

have written. Studies suggest that both the student writer and the peer reviewer benefit from these sessions. In one such study involving response groups, Sandra M. Lawrence and Elizabeth Sommers found that with "careful assignment scaffolding combined with substantial training and ample opportunities for peer collaboration," peer response groups became a successful classroom practice (101). Both Lawrence and Sommers teach students who attend a two-year college at a four-year University. Their instructional activities for their study took place in student-centered writing workshops where students discussed readings, works in progress, and other writing concerns. Lawrence and Sommers discovered that in peer response groups first-year college students were able not only to talk effectively about the texts, but also to use their peers' suggestions and feedback to revise their writing profoundly. Moreover, in his article "Teaching Students to Revise: Theories and Practice," Richard C. Raymond discusses how he uses peer evaluation of rough drafts to help direct students away from merely rewriting to revising. He asserts that through peer review students become adept at "diagnosing strengths and weaknesses in writing," which in turn often leads to better-revised papers (49).

In a peer review session, students respond to each other's draft through written comments and discussion, often during class time. However, a problem arises because inexperienced writers frequently lack the language of writing. In her article "Helping Peer Writing Groups Succeed," Wendy Bishop points out that students need to become familiar with the "vocabulary and terminology of the composition community" and identifies this deficiency as one of the causes that peer writing groups fail (121). So that a peer review session doesn't become a mutual admiration encounter ("I like your essay"/ "I like your essay too") or so that the reviewer doesn't come across as a tyrant leaving the student writer defeated, peer reviewers and student writers do best with training and practice. Activities such as group reviews, modeling, and role-playing are useful ways for students to become comfortable showing their own writing to their peers and learning how to comment on other students' writing. (Sample exercises have been included at the end of this section.)

In *The Craft of Revision,* Donald M. Murray supports the use of test readers as a way to "see in our own drafts what we have not seen before" (33). He applies the analogy of actors and directors using dress rehearsals to see how others react to their work to explain why authors

share their writing. Writers, too, need feedback from readers who can tell them what works and what needs work. Murray points out that members from a class make good test readers because they face the same tasks, as well as similar concerns and struggles. They know the parameters of the assignment, are juggling similar class/work/family/ social schedules, and bring to the table common weaknesses in writing. These shared experiences and challenges create an environment in which ideas can be expressed openly, where peers can candidly talk about the meanings and feelings found in a draft and where further examples or explanations are necessary. These test readers can provide that "extensive, hard-to-take" criticism Murray looks for that helps writers "see new possibilities, new challenges" in their drafts (35).

Murray argues that there are a variety of ways to promote a reading in process that will benefit the writer. He teaches his students how to encourage and control readers' responses by following five basic transactions:

- The writer explains the type of reading he needs and/or his main concern.

- The readers read the draft with the writer's instructions in mind.

- The readers tell the writer what they think works and needs work.

- The writer doesn't defend or explain but does ask follow-up questions that clarify the readers' responses.

- The readers make any other suggestions that they think will help the reader achieve the writer's intention. (40–41)

Murray's approach can easily be adapted for both a one-on-one peer review situation and large or small group responses. For large group responses, Murray has found it helpful to have students read the draft before the meeting. Sometimes he staples several sheets of paper to the draft and passes it around the room so that students can write their responses to the questions, "What works?" and "What doesn't work?" When working with small groups, Murray prefers to build them around the best students in the class so that each group has its own "expert practitioner." These groups stay together for several sessions so that they can follow the process and progress of each other's

work. Sometimes groups choose the best paper and will read it to the class, explaining why they chose it (41).

It does take some effort to create a collaborative environment where students feel comfortable enough to respond to Murray's central questions of "what works and what needs work" and are open to receiving suggestions. In "From the Park Bench to the (Writing) Workshop Table: Encouraging Collaboration among Inexperienced Writers," Lawrence and Sommers describe how they devote the first three weeks of their classes to demystifying the response-group process through ice-breaking and training exercises. In order to have successful peer response groups, they use a variety of peer-group configurations before students participate in a peer response session (102). One activity involves putting students in either pairs or groups of four and asking them to interview one another by following certain parameters, such as place of origin, ethnic heritage, particular interests, and views about writing. After the interview, the students introduce the group members to the class. Lawrence and Sommers use this ice-breaking activity to help "students see both their commonalties and their individual differences" (102). This encourages students to realize that there is a great deal they can learn from one another. It also models the types of thinking, listening, and writing they can expect to do in future class sessions. Lawrence and Sommers follow the interview with additional group activities that are intended to build trust among group members and promote collaboration, such as responding to readings, engaging in pre-writing discussions, and practicing writing strategies.

Participating in a number of group activities may not be enough to convince students of the value of group work or to teach them how group response can be used for revision. Lawrence and Sommers argue that instructors need to emphasize the purpose and benefits of peer response groups through discussion and further training exercises. Students need to be reminded how sharing their writing with others gives them the opportunity to see their ideas through someone else's eyes and perhaps gain a new perspective on their work. Other students may provide them with alternative approaches and ways to revise their drafts. This is also the time that instructors can talk about how the best feedback is that which centers around a paper's focus, content development, and organization rather than the surface blunders students are so fond of pointing out such as typographical or spelling errors. Other activities, such as reviewing and analyzing transcripts from ac-

tual peer response sessions followed by class discussions, or watching videos of peer response sessions are also ways students can become familiar with how peer groups can function (103).

Establishing a peer group that can operate effectively and efficiently can be challenging. In his book *Small Groups in Writing Workshops,* Robert Brooke, Associate Professor of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, explains that his approach is to let his students actively participate in choosing the members of their group and deciding how that group functions. He states that his overall goal for the small groups in his classes "is for the individual students to come to realize what they need from others to support their writing" (128). This type of decision making means that the student must consider the way in which the group works and assume some responsibility for its success and failure in meeting the student's needs. Brooke encourages this process with suggestions on how to form the groups themselves. Although his goal is to have groups of four or five people that will remain the same for the duration of the semester, he begins with a period of experimentation. For the first three weeks of classes, he encourages students to get into groups with different people each week and to record their impressions of these groups. In week four, he asks each student to make three lists: one list of four to six people the student would absolutely want in the group, a second list of individuals the student wouldn't mind being with in a group, and a third list of people the student does not want in the group under any circumstances. Using these lists, Brooke assembles groups based on the students' preferences (129).

In addition to choosing groups, Brooke points out that students must "develop strategies to guide discussions so they can get the responses they need to keep themselves writing" (132). He suggests that groups divide their time equally among writers, and that each writer should (1) tell the responders what sort of response he or she wants; (2) read the piece aloud; (3) repeat the request for a response, asking direct questions where necessary (132). In the beginning stages students may ask for listening or positive responses ("What do you hear me saying?" "What parts of the piece do you like best?"). As the weeks progress, students ask more direct-task responses ("What parts did you have trouble with?" "What changes would you make?").

Since Brooke wishes his students to make informed choices about their writing, their groups, and the responses they receive, he requires

that they write their own responses to their groups at the end of each session (135). Reflection allows students to think about how their group is functioning, how the students' responses are helping them find ideas, and where they might use these responses to revise their work. To help students get in the habit of reflection, Brooke leaves fifteen minutes at the end of each session for this activity. He asks them to respond to Elbow and Belanoff's three process log questions: "What happened?" "What do I think of my writing now?" and "What will I do next?" Brooke then asks volunteers to read their reflections aloud. This gives the class the opportunity to hear the different reactions people have to their group discussions (136).

Instead of group response, Richard C. Raymond uses one-on-one peer review to teach students how to revise. In "Teaching Students to Revise: Theories and Practice," Raymond starts from the premise that revision begins with prevision—what is your purpose and who is your reader. To help students form this prevision, he suggests that instructors provide writing projects rooted in students' interests or work experiences (50). Raymond devotes a class period, either in one large group or several smaller ones, generating ideas on assigned topics. Students may devise their own topics based on their *knowledge* and *experience,* adhering to what they know and what they care about (50). After this activity, Raymond asks his students to use one of the pre-writing techniques they have studied, such as looping, branching, or listing. He then requires them to prepare a written statement of purpose that identifies a reader, describes the reader's assumptions toward the topic, and discusses how these assumptions will affect the content and arrangement of the essay. Each student brings the written statement and a rough draft to class for a peer review session.

In this peer review session, Raymond distributes guidelines for the students to follow. The guidelines are intended to help the peer reviewer detect errors in focus or development and to offer strategies for improvement. Some questions the peer reviewer responds to are as follows:

- Is the thesis preceded by sentences that identify the subject, narrow the focus, and reveal writer's purpose?

- Does each topic sentence tie into thesis? Are examples sufficient and varied?

- What suggestions for improvement would you offer? (51)

After students write and sign their evaluations, Raymond encourages his students to talk one-on-one. He asserts that these discussions help "students become reader-centered, learning to detect the gap between the message intended and the message conveyed" (51).

Once the written and oral evaluations are completed, the students revise their rough drafts. To encourage his students to take the entire process seriously, Raymond requires that they turn in all prewriting, statement of purpose, the rough draft, and the signed evaluation with the second draft. Students who do not participate in the peer review sessions forfeit their right to revise further for a higher grade (51). For those students who do evaluate conscientiously, Raymond asserts, they gain "not only a thoughtful guide to revision," but also "more experience in diagnosing strengths and weaknesses in writing" (52).

A variation of reviewing papers with peers is to set up a small group that includes the instructor. In this process, each student, in turn, has a paper looked at by the group. The teacher, as much as possible, is an equal member of the group. Of course, the teacher may need to take an active role in encouraging the students to ask questions and give opinions. This can be a good learning experience for students because they can see the instructor thinking, questioning and discussing issues about writing in an informal atmosphere in which the student has peer support. It can also be helpful to the instructor because he is able to see what aspects of the revision process with which students are having most trouble. Another advantage for the instructor is that she can meet with more than one student at a time in order to review rough drafts. Further, it may relax the student because he is receiving comments without a grade. Ideally, once the students learn the language of revision, they may be able to function as a peer review group without the instructor.

Overall, students react favorably to these small group sessions. They find that they are able to get more personal attention, and they also appreciate the ideas and suggestions for improvement that the feedback generates.

Peer review, whether one-on-one or in groups, can have a positive impact on how students revise their work. The studies reviewed in this section support the argument that through peer review writing ceases to be a solitary act performed in isolation and becomes, instead, a vital means of communication where ideas, writing concerns, and revision strategies can be freely discussed and examined. Peer review encour-

ages students to participate in the conversation of writing and revision. Through role-playing, modeling, training, and practice, students learn the language of writing. And because of this dialogue with their peers, students also become more aware of their audience—their reader's attitude towards the topic and how it affects the content and arrangement of an essay. Peer review helps students to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses in writing, leading to improved revision.

Writing Centers and Other Writing Support Programs

In both secondary and higher education, writing centers and other writing support programs have played a vital role in assisting students' efforts to become better writers. In her essay "A Unique Learning Environment," Writing Center Director Pamela Farrell-Childers points out that places like writing centers provide a low-risk environment where students are encouraged to "play with language, question the validity of ideas, laugh at their own mistakes, and empathize with each other's frustrations" (112). She also asserts that because tutors do not give grades, students are more likely to engage in a dialogue that does not take place in classroom-teacher conferences. Once students are free from the time constraints of the classroom and the "peer pressure to respond in what students deem to be appropriate ways," they can get down to the business of focusing on such concerns as meaning, process, authorial intention, and audience expectation (121).

Realistically, teachers do not have the time to review carefully every stage of the writing process with every student on every assignment. Writing centers, and other writing support programs, can reinforce and enhance the practice of process writing. They may come in a variety of configurations and subscribe to a myriad of methods or theories, often reflecting, as Farrell-Childers points out, the "philosophy of the institution and the director of the writing center" (111).

An example of an interactive and collaborative program is the Writing Fellows at Brown University. Here, selected undergraduates are trained to help other students improve their writing skills across the curriculum. All Writing Fellows must complete a seminar course on the theory and practice of teaching writing in their first semester with the program. Each Writing Fellow is assigned to approximately 15–20 students in a class where at least two substantial papers are required. The instructor makes participation in the Writing Fellows

Program mandatory. The student submits a first draft of a paper to a Writing Fellow two weeks before it is due. The Writing Fellow focuses her comments on strengths and weaknesses in argumentation, analysis, organization, clarity, and style. The student then has time to reflect on the suggestions, meet with a Writing Fellow, and revise the paper. The student submits the final version along with the annotated first draft. This approach guarantees that all papers have been through at least one revision, and it also allows the professor to see the writing process the student went through to complete the assignment. In some Writing Fellows Programs, a Fellow will often attend several classes, becoming familiar with the students, the assignment, and the instructor's expectations. The instructor allows class time for the Writing Fellow to work with students on the writing assignment, either one-on-one or in small groups. The students may also be required to schedule one or two appointments with a Writing Fellow outside of class. Programs like the Writing Fellows encourage dialogue between peers so that students recognize that process writing leads to better papers.

Another example of a writing support program is the Writing Lab at Purdue University. In her case study "A Multiservice Writing Lab in a Multiversity: The Purdue University Writing Lab," Muriel Harris describes the types of writing the students engage in from freshman composition essays, term papers, lab reports, and doctoral dissertations to job application letters, resumes, and report forms for school contests. Because students come to the lab with diverse writing histories, writing needs, and learning styles, the focus of the Writing Lab is individualized instruction (1). The writing tutors work with students in the developmental course, the regular two-semester composition sequence, honors course, and with students enrolled in English-as-a-second-language courses. Tutors can also expect to work with students from business writing, technical writing, creative writing, and journalism courses.

The tutors in the Writing Lab are divided into three groups: (1) Writing Lab instructors—graduate students; (2) writing consultants—peer tutors; and (3) undergraduate teaching assistants—another group of peer tutors who work with students from the developmental composition program (10). Each group undergoes a separate training program where they are taught the theory and practice of collaborative learning, and general and specific tutoring principles that will assist

them as they support students through the writing and revision processes.

Besides using the method of one-to-one interaction with peer tutors, the Writing Lab has found other ways to meet the needs of students. For example, for students who prefer to work on their own and at their own pace, the Writing Lab has a large collection of self-instructional materials in grammar, rhetorical skills, spelling, vocabulary, business writing, and technical writing. For ESL students, the lab offers modules on listening comprehension, pronunciation, conversation skills, and vocabulary. Harris notes that end-of-semester evaluations indicate that ESL students in particular "express great satisfaction at having materials made available that they can study on their own" (16). The Writing Lab also houses a myriad of handouts on spelling, punctuation, usage, diction, revision, proofreading, documentation style, and so on. These handouts can be used in conjunction with verbal explanations and examples, as reference sheets for a student's notebook, or as supplementary materials for instructors' classes (19).

One unique component to Purdue's Writing Lab is what Harris refers to as the *writing room.* Since many of the composition courses are taught in the same building that houses the Writing Lab, students are encouraged to set aside one hour before or after a writing course to do some writing on their own. Students can usually find an empty chair at a table where they can write, as Harris states, "in an atmosphere where people all around them are busy 'talking writing'" (20). The benefits for students are that they have access to the bookshelves of reference material, and they can call on tutors to answer quick questions. Harris says that "students find that the informality and the conviviality of such a setting spurs them on to better writing" (20).

Besides working with students on campus, many of these writing support programs encourage the process of writing in other ways. Some offer online tutoring where students can submit their work and receive feedback from a tutor, often within 48 hours. Students have access to an online resource library, newsletters, and chatrooms. Other schools are involved in outreach programs like the Writing Lab at Purdue, offering a grammar hotline and noncredit courses where people in the community are able to make use of the Writing Lab for grammar review or tutorial response to short writing projects (Harris 21). Some programs, like the one at Medgar Evers College, create a partnership with area high schools, sending their trained tutors into the

high schools helping high school students improve their reading and writing skills in their subject-area courses (Greene 42).

As different and as unique as each of these writing centers and writing support programs are, they do share one commonality—all of them use a collaborative approach to supporting student writing and revision. In a low-risk environment, students share their writing with other students who have often undergone specific training in the theory and practice of collaborative learning and in tutoring principles. Students have the opportunity to meet with these specially trained tutors throughout the writing process—from idea-generating sessions, to first drafts, to final versions—sharing writing concerns, revision strategies, and successes along the way. These programs create a space where students can feel liberated from teacher criticism and evaluation and feel free, instead, to experiment with ideas and language as they move through the different stages of writing.

Portfolios

A benefit of using portfolios as a means for supporting revision is that they allow the students to track their progress as writers. By keeping a record of their drafts and final papers, students are able to see *their* process of writing: what ideas they first generated, how they supported those ideas, what type of feedback they received, what changes they made with each revised draft, and how the final copy of a paper compares to earlier drafts. At various times throughout the semester, particularly at mid-term and end-of-term, instructors can reinforce this benefit by requiring students to submit a written reflection on the steps they took to develop a paper and how these steps influenced their growth as writers.

In their book *Assessing the Portfolio,* Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon explore the theory and practice of integrating portfolios in writing programs and how they can be used for assessment purposes. They make the argument that in order to be effective, all portfolios must be built around three basic, but essential, components—collection, reflection, selection (118).

In its simplest forms, portfolios collect just the finished responses to more than one writing assignment. Some portfolios include not only the finished responses, but also earlier drafts. Other portfolios include writing produced under different circumstances, such as in-class

assignments, revised writing, papers done collaboratively, and writing addressed to different audiences. Hamp-Lyons and Condon point out, however, that without reflection and selection, all that is left for the student and the instructor is "simply a pile" of texts (119). Using reflective writing, such as a letter to the reader or a cover letter, students have the opportunity to demonstrate the growth they have made as writers. They can explore the processes they have used in their writing, discuss what they found challenging about the writing assignments and how they met those challenges, evaluate where they were successful, decide which skills need further development, and identify future goals. If students are then allowed to have some autonomy in choosing which writing samples to include in the portfolio, they can select those pieces that best represent the progress they have made as writers—they can determine the shape of their portfolios. Without selection, Hamp-Lyons and Condon argue, instructors "would be unable to judge how much the student understands about his or her own strengths and needs as a writer" (120). Furthermore, students would be unable to present their best work or show what they have learned.

The portfolio's characteristic of delayed evaluation enhances this reflection and selection process. Hamp-Lyons and Condon point out that because grading happens at the end of a term, students are motivated to revise their work (34). They have time to put some distance between themselves and their writing, to consider teacher and peer feedback, and to make decisions about their texts in progress. They can decide which papers they like best, which ones have the most potential, and which papers they would most like to develop or revise. Delayed evaluation could possibly encourage students to take risks with their writing that they might not otherwise take. They can practice using a different point-of-view on the same text, or try writing in another genre. And by including these successive and alternative drafts in a portfolio, students will have a more accurate representation of the effort they have put into their writing and a tangible record of their accomplishments.

As Hamp-Lyons and Condon argue, teacher assessment that only looks at final drafts are inadequate, for it does not take into consideration the growth a student goes through while revising. The final grade on a paper tells just a part of the story. The portfolio allows both the teacher and student to look back and reflect upon how the writer approached each assignment, how ideas were generated and developed,

and how the student used teacher, peer, and tutor comments to revise her work that lead to the final product.

Teacher and Student Conferences

In her book *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference,* Muriel Harris views teacher and student conferences as "opportunities for highly productive dialogues between writers and teacher-readers" (3). She continues by saying that not only does the one-to-one setting of a conference allow teachers to hear what students have to say about their writing, but it also provides a format in which teachers no longer have to talk about writing in the abstract and can address individual concerns and issues for each writer. Proponents of the one-to-one conference find that it is the most effective and efficient way to meet the needs of each student and to track individual progress as the student moves through the writing process.

In discussing the role of the conference and how it fits in the teaching of writing, Harris points out that by talking with students as they write or prepare to write, teachers reinforce the ideas that writing is a "process of discovery" and "primarily an act of communication" (5). The teacher assists in the process, helping the writer to move through multiple drafts, identifying areas of concern the writer might have, and teaching the writer strategies that she can use to help her navigate through the writing process. During a conference, the teacher encourages exploration by asking the student questions or making subtle suggestions. Using such simple prompts as "Why did you choose this topic?" or "What examples can you give?" the teacher can help the writer to discover ideas or material that has not yet been put into words. As these ideas are refined and reshaped, teachers can use these conferences to explore revision strategies and offer support and encouragement to the student who is feeling overwhelmed by the messy business of revising a paper. Without the one-to-one conference, Harris asserts, students will too often fall back on what they already know how to do, correcting spelling errors or changing a word or two. The personalized instruction of a conference empowers students to "go off on their own with some sense of what should be done," leading to more substantive changes in their writing (8).

Teachers often express concern as to what format to use and how to schedule conferences. There is no best answer to either of these

concerns—simplicity and flexibility appear to be what truly matters. Conventional classrooms can quickly be turned into writing workshop settings where small groups of students work on writing assignments together as the teacher walks around the room offering brief comments. Sometimes it may be preferable to have students working alone on writing assignments while the teacher meets with individual writers during class time. Alternatively, teachers may wish to schedule conferences outside of class, either meeting in an office or writing lab. Each of these formats can be effective ways of integrating conferences with the traditional methods of teaching writing. What is important is to create an environment where student and teacher can freely exchange ideas, a give-and-take atmosphere. Sitting side-by-side, or even better, at a round table enables the student and teacher to view the paper together. The teacher takes on the role of supporter participating in the writing process.

The length of the conference depends on the format. If students are engaged in small-group workshops, the teacher might spend a few moments briefly talking with each group. A scheduled conference might last anywhere from fifteen minutes during class time to thirty minutes in a writing lab or office. Beyond thirty minutes, the physical and emotional strains of a conference tend to make students and teachers less productive. If time is a concern, one solution might be group conferences. Some teachers have found that meeting with three or four students at a time is a good way to talk about writing concepts and revision strategies. And because there is safety in numbers, students may feel less intimidated than they would be in a one-to-one conference.

As Harris points out, the question as to when or how often to hold conferences has a simple answer—throughout the semester (50). Conferences can be held occasionally, offered at various times as a student progresses through a paper. Conferences at the prewriting stage can help students explore topics and generate ideas. During early drafts, conferences provide that extra boost students need when they feel they have run out of ideas or have strayed from their original intent. Scheduling conferences before the final draft is due is an excellent way for the teacher to provide reader feedback, crucial during the revision stage of writing. Everyone seems to agree that the one stage where a conference is not particularly profitable is after a final draft. Unless the student is given the opportunity to revise a final draft, a conference after the fact has limited benefits.

The advantage of integrating conferences into a writing program is that it gives both teacher and student the opportunity for an open dialogue about the writing process. The teacher can ask direct questions and help the student to develop ideas, consider alternative approaches, learn revision strategies, and generally offer support. The student benefits by receiving individual attention so his specific needs and writing concerns can be addressed. This open dialogue removes the mystique that surrounds writing, and turns the process of writing into something concrete and tangible that the student can put into application. And by holding conferences periodically throughout the semester, teachers reinforce the idea of open dialogue, providing reader feedback that is essential when students are at the revision stage of writing.

The onus is on instructors and directors of writing programs to find ways to encourage students to revise their work. Those of us in the business of teaching writing must help our students to see revision as an opportunity to grow as writers, as an act of discovery, not as punishment. How best to meet this challenge has been the focus of this chapter. The good news is that innumerable approaches promote revision—methods that can be used both in and out of the classroom. Using peer review, whether one-on-one or in small groups, is a good way to get students familiar with the language of the composition community. And because peers know the parameters of the assignment and share similar experiences and challenges, these sessions take place in an environment where ideas can be expressed openly. Writing centers and other writing support programs reinforce and enhance the practice of process writing by providing tutors who have been trained in the art of collaborative learning, and tutoring principles. Students benefit by receiving outside help with their writing from qualified tutors, self-instructional materials, learning modules, and online assistance. Portfolios support revision by allowing students to track their progress as writers—how they developed ideas, what type of feedback they received on their writing, how they used this feedback for revision, and how the final paper compared with earlier drafts. Finally, teacher and student conferences provide a format in which teachers can address individual concerns and issues for each writer. The teacher can help the student to discover new ideas and material, and can focus on specific revision strategies. The personalized instruction of a conference leads to more meaningful changes in the student's writing.

Each of these categories is based on the collaborative approach. Each encourages dialogue where ideas can be freely expressed, where exploration and experimentation are celebrated, and where the writing process is a shared experience. By incorporating these revision strategies into the teaching of writing, perhaps we can help students to see that "Revision is not the end of the writing process but the beginning" (Murray 1).

Group Review Exercise

This activity requires a student writing sample on an overhead or PowerPoint projection. The sample might be a draft of a short writing assignment or a paragraph or two of a longer assignment. The class looks at the sample and comments on what works and what doesn't work. Here the instructor takes on the role of facilitator. Students often will zero in on surface errors, such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar. The instructor can shift the focus by asking such questions as:

- What is the topic of this paragraph?

- What is the tone?

- Where has the writer used descriptive language?

- Where could the writer use more details?

- What is the writer trying to say?

- What would you like to hear more about?

The benefit of doing a group review is that the students can learn a great deal from hearing a variety of responses. Facing a peer review session, inexperienced students may be reluctant to express their opinions about a piece of writing. Peer reviewers might lack confidence or even the language of how to talk about writing. Student writers might not even know what types of questions they should ask during a review session. In a group setting, however, there appears to be strength in numbers. As some students offer feedback, others seem more willing to express their observations.

Modeling Exercise #1

In the first scenario the instructor takes on the role of the peer reviewer, while a student volunteer presents a short draft that needs revising. (It is preferable that the writing sample is not the student's paper. It is also helpful if the student is given a few minutes before the exercise to look over the writing sample.) The rest of the class watches as the instructor models the process. In an interactive exchange, the instructor and the student discuss the paper. The instructor moves through the writing pointing out specific successes, offering suggestions on improvement, and encourages the student to ask questions. The benefit here is that the students not only learn how to approach and talk about a piece of writing, but they also see first-hand how the instructor evaluates a written assignment. At the end of the modeling session, the instructor invites the rest of the class to comment on what they have just witnessed.

Modeling Exercise #2

(In the following activity the student volunteer is given the opportunity to practice some of the reviewing techniques he or she learned from the first modeling exercise.)

Another variation of this modeling exercise is to have the instructor and student reverse roles. The instructor pretends to be the student while the student becomes the peer reviewer. Using another writing sample, the instructor poses questions and concerns that students might have (or should have) about a writing assignment, such as what ideas need further development and what areas need clarification. Again, as the class watches this interactive exchange, they begin to gain a better understanding of how to focus on a draft that needs revising by learning what questions students should have about their writing and how to respond to those questions as peer reviewers. At the end of this activity, the instructor leads a discussion by asking the students to talk about what they observed. The instructor should also invite the student volunteer to tell the class what it felt like to be the student writer and the peer reviewer.

Role-Playing Exercise #1

The Fishbowl

(Role-playing is similar to modeling, except that the students are the participants and observers while the instructor facilitates the activity.)

In this exercise one student volunteer takes on the role of the peer reviewer while a second student plays the role of the writer. Using a short writing sample supplied by the instructor, the students model what would go on in a peer review session while the rest of the class watches. The student playing the role of the writer reads the paper aloud and asks the peer reviewer for help in specific areas. (It is useful if the instructor gives the students a chance to read the writing sample before engaging in this activity.) For example, the student might express concerns about the paper being too short or sounding too repetitious. The peer reviewer would respond using some of the composition terms and vocabulary the instructor introduced during the modeling sessions. At the end of the review session the rest of the class would report back on what they observed. The instructor might guide the discussion by asking the class the following questions: Were the specific areas for which the student writer asked for help the same areas that you have trouble with when you write a paper? What do you think went well in the session? What would you have done differently?

Role-Playing Exercise #2

One-On-One

For this exercise the instructor breaks the class up into pairs and gives each pair a short writing sample. Once again, one student volunteers to play the role of the student writer while the other is the peer reviewer. (The instructor should encourage the students to take a few minutes to read over the writing sample before beginning the role-playing exercise.) The student writer reads the paper aloud and asks the peer reviewer specific questions about global issues, especially in the areas of development and organization. After giving the students a reasonable amount of time for the first part of this activity, the instructor has the students reverse roles and repeat the process, preferably with a different writing sample. Throughout the session the students apply the terminology and techniques about peer review and the writ-

ing process. A class discussion follows this activity where each pair reports back on what happened during their one-on-one peer review session. The instructor might ask the following questions: What did the student writer ask the peer review to focus on? How did the peer reviewer respond to the questions? What was the biggest challenge the peer reviewer faced in trying to help the writer?