

Preface

Revision holds a special place in writing research, practice and pedagogy. As a highly visible, public, and craft-like aspect of the writing process, revision early became associated with writing skill in a way that appealed to teachers and writers of all levels and approaches to writing. Working with existing text and improving it has a substantial and finite quality that defines it in ways that elude the more evanescent and complex invention, as reviewed in the first volume in this series. Nonetheless, revision moves beyond narrow issues of correctness, associated with editing and error based evaluation, to engage some of the complexity and subtlety of the writer's craft. Revision is something that published writers could attest to and literary archives could reveal in the multiple drafts of famous works. In composition pedagogy revision is a key focus of individual student-teacher conferences, discussing how a student paper could be improved. In revision one can concretely help students in a focused way that matches their levels of skill and learning as well as their expressive motives. As tutorial labs emerged, revision was a natural site of work, as it also became for small peer groups—for it was a task that students could provide useful help to each other.

For those whose pedagogy emphasizes expression and creativity, the security of having well developed revision opportunities and support later in the process frees students in the earliest stages of writing to turn off the censor; nonetheless, this postponement of craft work until text has emerged to work on provides concrete focus and motive for attention to language. For those concerned with development of specific elements of student writing, such as detail, or argument structure, or sentence clarity and variety, revision makes those issues substantive and immediate. More formally-minded writers and instructors can turn to issues of correctness and well-formedness at a moment when students could see the attention as helpful and formative rather than evaluative and punitive. For those concerned with ESL writers, revi-

sion is a site to help students formulate their ideas into communicative English and to recognize the patterned interferences introduced by their first language. Similarly, for teachers of basic writers focus on revision provides opportunities for students to develop their first ideas into fuller statements, expanding their range of expression. Revision offers something for every kind of student and every pedagogic stance. We see some of these many elements in the chapters of this book.

Yet for all its defined activity and craft, revision contains a mystery: How can this seeing again, this re-visioning come about? How can one see one's words fresh in a deep way, opening up and evaluating alternative ways of developing and expressing one's thoughts? People seem to be deeply attached and committed to the words they initially come up with through hard struggles. The words seem their own, and were their best solution at the moment to the problem of saying what they want to say. How can it be said any differently without losing its essence? This attachment to first formulations seems to be true both for the struggling beginner grasping onto any words produced and the more accomplished writer proud of his or her style and ideas.

As teachers we have developed many tricks to help students to see the writing freshly, to get them outside their words, to give them leverage on texts. We suggest putting texts aside and sleeping on them to get the distance of time. We find ways to enlist others to provide another perspective—through simply having students read their texts aloud to listeners who provide an account of what they got from reading the text, to peer editors providing full scale revision comments of their own. We offer specific heuristic questions for students and revision groups to use to interrogate the texts. Yet no matter what device we use one of the most robust research findings is that students tend to revise essays shallowly, following only very concrete revision suggestions or working only on minor phrasal adjustment and sentence correctness. Even when as word processing has facilitated the moving of text, the substitution of phrasing, even the marking up and transfer of drafts, still that ability to see one's own text with fresh eyes remains elusive.

Revision: History, Theory and Practice, the third volume of the Reference Guides to Rhetoric and Composition reviews the research, practice, and pedagogy on revision and places it within the broader concern for process. In so doing it identifies and explores more recent work on the kinds of awareness that make one able to view one's writ-

ing through fresh eyes: a writer's awareness of his or her self as a writer using particular writing processes; a strategic awareness of one's personal ways of recognizing difficulties and eliciting support; and a well developed awareness of the way language works and what alternatives are possible to have different effects. These kinds of awareness suggest that we need to teach our students something beyond the writing process itself, to develop the underlying knowledge and awareness that need to be brought to bear in revision. It is my hope that this synthesis will mark the beginning of a new period in revision research and pedagogy that opens up new issues of writer's knowledge and craft, and that is sensitive to the variety of tasks and situations writers engage in. The issues raised by revision can open fresh looks at writing process, through the lens of how writers come to know, understand, and develop themselves as individuals and writers engaged within particular writing situations. And the issues raised here about revision can open up more precise analyses of what it is writers can most usefully understand about language, and how different knowledges about language can facilitate different kinds of writing.

—*Charles Bazerman*