

REVISION

to the Rescue

Rethinking the Writing Process

Developing & Managing Critique Groups

Grades 4-6



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RETHINKING THE WRITING PROCESS

Are you frustrated with students who don't know how to revise their own writing? Do you spend hours correcting poorly written essays? Do you find that despite your best writing lessons, your students still struggle to organize their ideas into meaningful paragraphs and neglect to support their ideas with evidence? Do their short stories lack substance, character development, and sensory details?

You aren't alone. Let's face it. Most district adopted ELA and writing programs – if you have one -- have absolutely zilch on the revision process. In fact, for the most part, writing is relegated to a very small, isolated part of our daily instruction, however writing and revision are heavily tested in the Common Core era.

So, it's time to put down the red pen and rethink how we approach reading, writing, and revision in our classrooms. Here's how:

1. Turn your reading-centric class into a writing-centric one. Treat every story and article you read as an opportunity to analyze great writing.
2. Stop thinking of writing as a linear process. It isn't. Writing is a very fluid process. As a writer, I might start with a spark of an idea, begin drafting, then stop to research a location, and back to drafting. Or I might talk over my idea with a friend and revise it before I ever begin my first draft. Revision is a process that happens – not just at the end of the draft – but throughout the entire writing process.
3. When the kids have questions about writing, don't answer the question. Instead, tell them to consult the real experts in writing . . . their favorite authors! Your classroom library is probably filled with expert writers. How did their favorite author start their book? How do authors punctuate dialogue? Student discovery is the key!
4. Stop revising and editing your students' work. The only one learning from the process is the teacher. Instead, help the kids develop their own critical eye and encourage them to trust their gut instinct. Together analyze writing samples of all kinds. Good, bad, and everything in between.

Revision to the Rescue is a system of simple revision strategies that can be woven effortlessly into your daily curriculum, turning reluctant revisers into critical analyzers, all the while improving your test scores. When students examine great writing, scrutinize flawed writing, and justify their revision choices, they will become brilliant writers. It's simple, it's fun, and above all else, it works at any grade level.

CRITIQUE GROUP MANAGEMENT

When professional authors write, they have trusted critique groups that they turn to for support. Sometimes authors just need advice or to bounce ideas off someone else to ensure the story makes sense. Or to simply get fresh eyes on a writing sample before it gets sent to the editor or publisher.

Here are a variety of ways to use critique groups for peer feedback in your classroom setting.

Analyze Bad Writing Samples

Display on the board a teacher-created writing sample. Start off with telling the class that you wrote the sample in a hurry and that you realize it is badly written. You need their help improving it. This writing sample should not include any grammatical, spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors. Instead, focus on writing samples that have content issues such as: writing that gets off topic, lack details, are poorly organized, include boring words, etc. I usually include the kinds of errors I see my students making. Since you are the author of the bad writing sample, the students will be more honest in their feedback, and won't have to worry about hurting anyone's feelings. Even if some of the students don't speak up, they are still learning from the feedback others give.

Whole Group Public Critique

Place an anonymous paper on the overhead or ELMO for critique. Personally, I like borrowing writing samples from other teachers at my grade, or from other grade levels. If your class knows the anonymous student author belongs to another class, they have no fear of retribution later and will be brutally honest. The students love watching the process unfold and really learn a lot from their peers.

Small Critique Groups

Forming critique groups in the classroom allows revisions to happen throughout the entire writing process. It's important that these groups meet on a regular basis and stay consistent so that members can build up trust. Begin by grouping 4-6 kids together. Build groups thoughtfully so that a mixture of abilities is represented, allowing everyone to learn from someone else. Students take turns sharing their own writing sample by reading it aloud to the group. While they read, they may stop to fix any errors they find, such as repeated words, omitted words, and spelling errors. When done, the critique group partners discuss the virtues of the writing and pinpoint up to 3 or 4 major revisions to be made. The student author will record their own feelings about their work and will summarize the suggestions their peers made. Ultimately, it's up to the student author to either accept or reject the suggestions, but they must explain their rationale.

Class Debrief

Following a critique group session, hold a class debrief where students can share what they've learned about their writing habits. Students can then make a plan for continued growth and practice in these specific areas.

EDITING VS. REVISING

Far too often, people confuse editing and revising and assume they mean the same thing. In actuality, they are two very different concepts and are equally important to the revision process.

Revision literally means **RE – VISION** as in to see again, to look at with fresh eyes. Did the initial vision for the writing piece change? Did my message come across the way I intended?

Editing deals with the things that affect the readability of a piece, such as spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. We're basically making it prettier and easier to read.

When we give kids "revision" activities that are in fact "editing" activities, we are only teaching them to look at surface errors. Why search for spelling errors, if the paragraph is only going to be deleted in the long run because it was off topic? Instead, use critique groups for revision activities throughout the entire writing process. Editing is the last step in the process.

EDITING VS. REVISING

**Improves
Readability**

**Clarifies
Meaning**

Critique Group Norms	Feedback Frames
1. Keep an open mind. Be open to giving and receiving feedback. 2. Stay focused on the author who is reading their writing. Ignore distractions. 3. Participate fully. Listen to ALL of the people in the group. 4. Be an active listener. 5. Be honest, but polite. 6. Be specific. What exactly did you like or dislike? What can the author do to improve? Don't repeat what has already been said. 7. Learn from each other.	➤ I really liked how you ➤ I appreciate that you tried to ➤ I wonder if you tried ➤ When you said _____ it made me think of ➤ One area you might want to focus on is the ➤ I was confused when ➤ I think you might be missing ➤ Could you clarify what you meant when you said ➤ What would happen if you ➤ I (dis)agree with because ➤ Could you repeat

Writing Workshop Etiquette

If you are the author:

- Begin by telling your group what you would like them to focus their comments on.
 - Plot – does it make sense?
 - Organization
 - Supporting Details
 - Sensory Details
 - Word Choice
 - Overall reaction to the piece
- Read your writing aloud to the entire group. You can choose to read the entire story/essay, or just a portion that you are having trouble with.
- Listen to all of the comments without getting angry. Remember, your group is here to help you improve.
- Take notes about the comments, questions, or suggestions that were brought up. Put a star next to the comments that spark your interest and imagination.

Reminders:

If multiple people say the same thing, consider what revisions you might make. If you find yourself needing or wanting to defend your writing, remember that it doesn't matter what you meant to say, only how your reader interpreted your story or essay. If the reader is confused, figure out how you can revise to make it clearer.

If you are not the author:

- Listen to the author carefully and politely.
- First, find something positive to comment on. What did the author do well?
- Think of open-ended questions you still have or would like to ask the writer. Was there something that was unclear in the story? Or things you still want to know more about?
 - Start your questions with words like How? Why?
- Offer constructive feedback:
 - Are there details that could be added?
 - Are there lackluster words and images that can be spiced up?
 - Does the structure and organization of the piece make sense?
 - Is there a moment that could be expanded?
 - Is there a part that could be cut or shrunk?
 - Does the dialogue sound natural?
 - Are there thoughts, actions, or insights?

Reminders:

Your job is not to fix the story or essay for the author, but to give honest feedback. The author is always free to fix their writing as they see fit, even if they ignore all of the advice/suggestions that the writing group has given them. It's okay. Your job is to learn from and support each other.

Receiving Feedback

1. Listen to your peers very carefully and don't interrupt them when they are giving their feedback.
2. Keep an open mind and don't get mad. Your friends are trying to help you improve your writing. Sometimes we don't like hearing negative feedback, but it will help you improve.
3. If you don't understand what your writing partners are saying, ask for clarification.
4. Say THANK YOU and then write down the suggestions you heard.
5. Think about the feedback and suggestions your critique partners gave you. Now that the errors have been pointed out, do you see them, too? If not, ask for a second opinion from another critique group.

REMEMBER:

The goal of writing is to communicate our thoughts, feelings, and knowledge to other people. The goal of revising is to make the message clear, so the reader understands.

Giving Feedback

1. Listen to the author very carefully. Don't get distracted. Stay focused on what the author is saying.
2. Start with something you liked. Be specific. Did the author do a good job staying on topic? Did they give convincing reasons for their opinion? Did they bring their characters to life?
3. Give 1 or 2 suggestions for improvement. Always start with the big stuff, such as:
 - Did the author stay on task and answer the writing prompt?
 - Did the story or essay make sense?
 - Did the ideas or plot flow together well?
4. Don't get upset if the author does not take your advice. Remember, it's their writing.

EXPOSITORY WRITING: Self-Critique Form

Your Name: _____

Title: _____

DIRECTIONS: Read your essay aloud to your critique group. When you find a mistake, fix it. When you are done reading, listen to the feedback from your writing partners. Then record their feedback and complete this form.

Did I . . .

Yes	No	Answer the writing prompt
Yes	No	Stay on topic
Yes	No	Hook my reader in the introduction
Yes	No	Include multiple supporting details
Yes	No	Explain each detail with an example or an explanation
Yes	No	Use transition words or phrases to move from idea to idea
Yes	No	Use great, lively words
Yes	No	Include a conclusion

When I read my paper aloud, I noticed: _____

My peers suggested: _____

I will fix the following things: _____

I also need to check my: ☐ Spelling ☐ Capitalization ☐ Punctuation ☐ Typing

EXPOSITORY WRITING: Peer Critique Form

Your Name: _____

Author's Name: _____

DIRECTIONS: Listen carefully to the author as they read their paper aloud. Think about what the author did well and what the author could do to improve their writing.

I really liked how you: _____

How could the author improve his/her writing?

- ☐ Stay on topic. Delete sentences that are off topic.
- ☐ Add a topic sentence or stronger introduction
- ☐ Add more supporting details
- ☐ Change the order of the details or sentences
- ☐ Add transitions words
- ☐ Replace weak words with stronger academic words
- ☐ Add a conclusion

To make your writing stronger, I suggest you: _____

BASIC CRITIQUE FORM

What is the main idea of the essay?	What details support the main idea?
What did the author do well? ☐ Stayed on topic ☐ Included multiple supporting details ☐ Used transitions to move from idea to idea ☐ Explained each detail with an example ☐ Used great, lively words	How could the author improve their writing? ☐ Stay on topic ☐ Add a topic sentence ☐ Add a supporting detail ☐ Delete a sentence ☐ Reorder the sentences ☐ Add transitions ☐ Use stronger verbs
Suggested Revisions	

ADVANCED CRITIQUE FORM

What is the main idea of the essay?	What details support the main idea?
Your Analysis of Original Writing	
Your Revision Suggestions	
Explain why these changes are necessary	

PERSUASIVE WRITING: Self-Critique Form

Your Name: _____

Title: _____

DIRECTIONS: Read your essay aloud to your critique group. When you find a mistake, fix it. When you are done reading, listen to the feedback from your writing partners. Then record their feedback and complete this form.

Did I . . .

- | | | |
|-----|----|---|
| Yes | No | Answer the writing prompt |
| Yes | No | Stay on topic |
| Yes | No | Talk about the topic, problem, or issue |
| Yes | No | Give my opinion |
| Yes | No | Give reasons for my opinion |
| Yes | No | Support my reasons with evidence from text or life experiences? |
| Yes | No | Elaborate and explain the evidence |
| Yes | No | Use transition words or phrases to move from idea to idea |
| Yes | No | Use great, lively words |
| Yes | No | Include a conclusion |

When I read my paper aloud, I noticed: _____

My peers suggested: _____

I will fix the following things: _____

I also need to check my: ☐ Spelling ☐ Capitalization ☐ Punctuation ☐ Typing

PERSUASIVE WRITING: Peer Critique Form

Your Name: _____

Author's Name: _____

DIRECTIONS: Listen carefully to the author as they read their paper aloud. Think about what the author did well and what the author could do to improve their writing.

I really liked how you: _____

How could the author improve his/her writing?

- ☐ Stay on topic. Delete sentences that are off topic.
- ☐ Add a stronger introduction that introduces the topic or problem
- ☐ Add more evidence to back up your reasons
- ☐ Explain your reasons and evidence
- ☐ Change the order of the sentences or paragraphs
- ☐ Add transitions words
- ☐ Replace weak words with stronger academic words
- ☐ Add a conclusion

To make your writing stronger, I suggest you: _____

NARRATIVE WRITING: Self-Critique Form

Your Name: _____

Title: _____

DIRECTIONS: Read your story aloud to your critique group. When you find a mistake, fix it. When you are done reading, listen to the feedback from your writing partners. Then record their feedback and complete this form.

Did I . . .

- | | | |
|-----|----|--|
| Yes | No | Answer the writing prompt |
| Yes | No | Include setting details (location, season, weather, time period) |
| Yes | No | Include vivid characters with unique personalities and habits |
| Yes | No | Include a believable problem/conflict |
| Yes | No | Give my main character a goal to accomplish |
| Yes | No | Show my main character trying to solve the problem but fail |
| Yes | No | Use transition words or phrases to move from idea to idea |
| Yes | No | Use great, lively words and sensory details (5 senses) |
| Yes | No | Use dialogue and/or character thoughts and emotions |
| Yes | No | Include a resolution to the problem/conflict |

When I read my story aloud, I noticed: _____

My peers suggested: _____

I will fix the following things: _____

I also need to check my: ☐ Spelling ☐ Capitalization ☐ Punctuation ☐ Typing

NARRATIVE WRITING: Peer Critique Form

Your Name: _____

Author's Name: _____

DIRECTIONS: Listen carefully to the author as they read their story aloud. Think about what the author did well and what the author could do to improve their writing.

I really liked how you: _____

How could the author improve his/her writing?

- ☐ Add more setting details
- ☐ Describe the characters more
- ☐ Add dialogue
- ☐ Describe the action more – add narration
- ☐ Slow down the pacing - the story moved too quickly or jumped around
- ☐ Replace weak words with stronger academic words
- ☐ Add a strong ending to the story

To make your writing stronger, I suggest you: _____

CRITIQUE REFLECTION

AUTHOR'S NAME: _____

STORY TITLE: _____

1. With a pencil in your hand, READ your story out loud to your partner(s). Mark any place where you stumbled over your words. Mark places where the dialogue sounded unnatural or where you were confused.
2. LISTEN thoughtfully to your critique partner(s). LIST each suggestion they have made.
3. THINK about the suggestions your partner(s) made and explain why you will, or will not, use each suggestion.

Suggestion from Critique Partner	My thoughts on this suggestion

Critique Group Roles: Narrative Writing

Content Editor

Does the story make sense?

What is confusing about it?

What details need to be added or subtracted?

Line Editor

Check for misspelled words.

Check the punctuation.

Does each sentence make sense?

Are there run-ons?

Correct any missed words or repeated words.

Characterization Editor

Who is telling the story?

Are setting details included to help the reader visualize the story?

Is the action narrated?

Does the main character have emotions & thoughts?

Dialogue Doctor

Check each line of dialogue.

Did the author include a dialogue tag so we know who is speaking?

Does the dialogue include an action tag so we know what is going on at the same time?

Does the dialogue sound like something real people would say? Point out places where the dialogue needs to be fixed.

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for your purchase! I hope you and your students enjoy this resource and have fun while learning more about the writing process. If you encounter any issues with your file or notice pesky errors or misspellings, please contact me. I'd be more than willing to help in any way that I can. Reviews and feedback are always welcome!



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