

**Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center
Hamilton College**

Faculty Revision Practices

Below are examples of faculty revision practices in Writing Intensive courses. The faculty were identified by writing tutors as having effective ways of incorporating revision into courses. As you can see, there is a range of approaches for incorporating revision, depending on course specifics.

Alfred Kelly, History: guidelines for revision

I don't have anything formally written out, but this is basically it for WI courses. (For non-WI courses, revisions are encouraged but not required.)

1. Students must revise at least one paper. They may revise all of them.

2. My comments are in the form of specific, positive suggestions for revisions. For example, bring to bear this particular reading; probe deeper into the relationship mentioned on page 3; clarify this historical context; rewrite the first paragraph so that it commits you to do something that you can check at the end; rewrite the last paragraph so that it concludes something. Basically, I'm trying to persuade them that the revisions are really coming not from me, but are explorations of what they're already saying. Comments that are polite versions of "Your paper stinks" may be satisfying to the hard-pressed professor, but they don't help the student revise.

3. When I hand papers back, we take class time to work on representative weak sentences, or we critique first sentences (anonymously). Sometimes I read aloud paragraphs from good papers.

4. Students are encouraged (but not required) to meet with me one-on-one about their revisions.

5. In a conference, I often point to a particular place in the paper where the student misses an opportunity to probe deeper. I either read them a paragraph from a paper that did probe deeper or ask questions to elicit more thought.

6. Revision requires rethinking, not just fixing the grammatical or syntactical errors.

7. All changes in the revised version must be in bold type (makes it obvious to them and to me whether they've done anything substantial).

8. Students must hand in the original with the revised version. Also, students must hand in a paragraph explaining how they have responded to the revision suggestions.

9. All revisions are due within one week of when the papers are handed back.

10. The final grade for the paper is the average of the original and the revised grade.

Policy on reading rough drafts:

I will read rough drafts if 1) I get them in time to read and comment on them, and 2) the students have enough time to take into account what I say.

Lisa Trivedi and Thomas Wilson, History 180: syllabus statement:

Because this is a writing intensive course, students will earn a substantial part of their final grade through four writing assignments (80%). Students are required to review their first paper at the Writing Center with a peer tutor, although they are strongly encouraged to avail themselves of these services for all three writing assignments.

REVISION POLICY: Each of the first three writing assignments may be revised in consultation with the faculty member; revisions will be due 10 days after the graded assignment is returned to the student. The grades earned for original version will be averaged with that earned for the revision in calculating the final grade. Revisions must respond to comments and suggestions on the first version. The more significantly you develop the argument of the original version, either in conception or use of evidence, the more likely the revision grade will improve upon the original. Grades for revised versions that just correct mistakes noted in comments on the original are not eligible for change. When submitting the revision, briefly and concretely describe in your email how your revised version addresses the instructor's comments on the original.

Katherine Terrell, English & Creative Writing: syllabus statement:

You're permitted to revise and resubmit one essay (of essays #1-3). The final grade on this one essay will be the average of the original grade and the revision grade. The best revisions will involve substantial rethinking of the original argument, additional development of ideas, and improved organization, as well as attention to grammatical errors and technical details. Revisions that merely involve superficial tidying will not receive an improved grade.

I try to devote a little class time to thinking about strategies for revision, but there never seems to be as much time for that as I'd like--and I'm not sure that I have terribly good general advice to give. I'm better at working with students one-on-one in office hours, when we have a particular essay in front of us; that makes it easier to plan a revision strategy. One thing I do usually tell students is not to spend too much time fiddling with the original Word document--instead, open a blank document and start fresh, copying and pasting from the original as necessary, but giving yourself the freedom to write new material or rearrange the old.

John Bartle, Russian Studies: syllabus statement on revision:

This class is writing-intensive, so we will occasionally have discussions about what makes a paper effective and persuasive. You will write five essays (each 4-5 pages in length) as well as a few shorter assignments. To help you organize your writing, you will be given a set of suggested topics. I encourage you to develop these topics into an idea of your own. If you choose to write on a topic not on my list, that's fine; however, please do me the courtesy of clearing your idea with me before you begin to write. For additional help with all the papers, I encourage you to make an appointment at the Writing Center.

All assignments must be double-spaced with standard margins and standard form for footnotes and bibliography.

Sharing your work with others is an important element of this course. For each paper, you must write *at least* two drafts.

For the first two essays, I will be your reader. You will submit your work to me, I will make extensive comments, and then I'll return your draft to you for revisions.

The third essay you will share with a partner in this class. I will give all of you a peer revision guide with questions to consider as you read your partner's paper. You will make extensive comments, then return the paper to the author for revisions. Please note that your grade for this assignment will be based on what you do as writer and as reader.

For the fourth essay, you will meet with a tutor at the Writing Center for discussion and comments.

For the final assignment, you may choose any of the options above.

I fully understand the apprehension that can arise from sharing your work with others. I also know the rewarding satisfaction that comes from mutual understanding and working through problems with another person. I ask for your patience and compassion as well as your attentive critical eye in reading others' work and in talking about your own. My goal is to make writing a more enjoyable and satisfying experience for you.

Jane Springer, English & Creative Writing: revision strategies used in English 204

- 1) I discuss papers in office hours prior to due dates.
- 2) We take 10 minutes here and there during class to talk about issues springing up in papers and possible solutions to problems.
- 3) I assign Writing Center conferences for drafts.
- 4) After students have revised based on the Writing Center comments, I offer to look at the 2nd (or 3rd drafts).
- 5) We then hold a peer review workshop. How this works: **a)** 4 copies of each class member's twice-revised paper are due in class the weekend before the workshop. **b)** Over the weekend, students provide in-margin comments for 3 peers each, and they attach a letter to each of their 3 assigned papers. These letters include a list of strengths, questions, and revision strategies. (I have a handout that lists these guidelines. **c)** The day of the workshop each author (in her group of 4) sits quietly while her paper is discussed by the others. **d)** A timekeeper cuts off discussion of each paper after 15 minutes. **e)** Group members then vote on one paragraph to read from one paper in each group. They discuss with the whole class why this paragraph was so exceptionally appealing that it warranted reading aloud. *What I do not tell students is that each group of 4 workshop members has one exceptional writer, one strong writer, and two weaker writers.
- 6) Once I receive the final drafts, I make in-margin comments. When possible I try to pose questions, e.g. "Would you provide examples here?" I underline what's going well.
- 7) I attach a letter to each paper. I try to include praise for what is going well, as well as a list of goals to work on during the semester. (example below).
- 8) I hold a mandatory, 25 minute conference with each student. We cover each point from my typed letter, and I point to examples from their paper and answer questions. I ask, "What was your process of writing this? How much time did you spend writing it?," etc.

According to the feedback, I then might require all papers go through the Writing Center, or suggest students show me drafts a week before the due date, etc.

- 9) After conferences, I write everyone's grade on the board (no names) and if there are areas that pertain to most class members (e.g. "how to craft a thesis" or "titles of poems go in quotes, not italics")— we go over these as a class.
- 10) On subsequent papers, I reprint my letters from the first papers and follow up, in writing, on how far along each student is on his or her list of goals. For example, if a person no longer has a problem including textual evidence, I write "goal achieved" and put in that goal's place a new goal.
- 11) Only one paper goes through all of these steps (the 2nd paper). For other papers I omit the peer workshop or the mandatory group conference or the mandatory Writing Center appointment, etc. Also, while students may turn in as many drafts to me as they like before paper deadlines—I only allow folks to re-write one paper post final grade.

Jane Springer, sample letter to Eng. 204 student

Dear xxxx,

I think this is a good draft of a paper with some interesting observations regarding both craft and content. But it is more a summary of "what the poem means" than a detailed analysis supporting a radical re-envisioning of this sonnet. Whether or not you choose to revise this particular paper, here is what I'd like to work with you on this semester:

- 1) **Crafting a clear, complex and interesting thesis:** Right now it seems your opening thesis is that the poem works like a bell? Mostly it's summary of the poem's meaning that follows—is it possible to structure each paragraph so that it supports this notion thoroughly, then end the paper with a suggestion for why the bell-like structure is essential to re-envisioning the poem as something larger than a love poem?
- 2) **Evidence:** The closest you come to supporting your thesis is when you suggest that the poem moves back and forth melodically via rhyme scheme—what rhyme scheme? ABAB? And what of the eye rhymes? What are they—and how do they contribute to the bell-like qualities? Textual evidence is what substantiates your claims—working without it is like trying to try a case with no physical evidence—so each paragraph should be full of examples from the text—3-5 of them. 2nd paper: **While this could use a little more work—you've also shown vast improvement here.**
- 3) **Strengths:** You speak quite a bit of the contradictions in this poem—I think these contradictions might also fit into the back and forth motion of this bell structure, yes? So I find great potential in your draft. You also have a natural (as opposed to stiff) voice—this can be seen in your opening and title—it makes the experience of reading the paper a joy because it does not feel like a "5 paragraph theme."

I love this draft. It's full of good ideas and intuitions that need support. Want to revise it? If so—I am happy to look at subsequent drafts.

Best,
Jane

Rob Martin, Government: guidelines for revision in WI courses

Here's a brief overview. My general approach to revision (in both intro and advanced courses) has evolved over time, and though I have thought seriously about how to make it work better for writing instruction, I've also intentionally worked to make it more manageable. I used to allow students to rewrite any essay and found that approach simply too burdensome. To that end, I don't allow any rewrites in non-WI courses.

For WI courses:

Essay 1: This is the only paper I grade twice as polished versions: First version is 5% of the final course grade (I've found 2% or even 3% isn't enough to get serious efforts); they have a week to do a required rewrite worth 10%.

Essay 2: Required Writing Center conference, w/ draft emailed to me half a week before final version is due to me, so that I know that they've got decent drafts for going to the center. They make their revisions, and I grade only the final version. 15% (No re-write option.)

Essay 3: Required peer review (with a worksheet). I "grade" the peer reviews to make sure they try to do a decent job; the authors make their revisions; and I grade only the final version of the paper. (Again, no rewrite option.) 15%.

Essay 4: Usually a research paper. I review and grade a rough draft (again probably 5%); they revise based on my comments (which are usually pretty broad-stroke for the rough draft), and then I grade the final version. (No re-write: the term is over and I'm exhausted.) 20 or 25%.

The obvious logic (apart from limiting my workload) is that in the first paper they need more help understanding what I'm after, so I'd better make it relatively low-stakes and give them my feedback. On the second paper they're getting help from folks trained to help them write better. On the third, they've been through peer review so can now take on the task of providing a peer with a review. And then, on the last/research paper, I need to weigh in, less on the writing (one hopes), but more on the research, hence the basic comments on the rough draft.

P.S. One last thing: When appropriate, I've sometimes had the class read something of mine and task them w/ critiquing the writing; they're usually tentative at first, but not for long. Better yet, I've read them one particular R & R I got from a history journal for an essay that the journal eventually published. It's one thing to tell them how hard writing is; it's another to let them hear someone rip through your own writing. Works wonders.

Margie Thickstun, English & Creative Writing: syllabus statement on revision:

The process of revising, of seeing your work with new eyes and rethinking your response to a question constitutes the bulk of what scholars and professional writers do. In addition to revising your tutorial drafts for submission, you may revise one essay toward a new grade. The process of revision should provide benefits beyond an improved grade. If you choose to revise, you must meet the following conditions: 1) arrange to meet with me to discuss your original paper within one week of my returning it to you; 2) present the revised version within one week

of that conference, with the original version—the one with my comments—attached. A successful revision will move beyond "fixing" local errors as it presents a reframed or refined thesis, amplified evidence, and a more nuanced discussion of its topic than was present in the original.

Anne Lacsamana, Women's Studies: revision procedures for 100 and 400 level courses:

For one paper, students may choose one to send a draft for review, but it must be sent a full week ahead of the paper deadline. Students may also rewrite one paper if they received a B or lower. I require students to send drafts far in advance because it takes 7-10 days for me to thoroughly read and comment on all papers. I often tell students to go to the Writing Center after giving them feedback. Although I make many suggestions, I hope that students revise the entire essay, based on my suggestions, rather than just fixing the specific things marked. When I receive a rewrite, I average the two grades.

Sharon Rivera, Government:

My WI courses focus heavily on improving analytical writing skills. For all essays I provide extensive feedback in the form of in-paper corrections as well as a separate sheet of general suggestions. I also provide a small amount of extra credit for those who go to the Writing Center when it is not required.

Students are required to revise one paper. In my introductory course, I average the original and the revision grade. In my upper-level course, in which the revision is of a research prospectus for a 25-page research paper, the revised prospectus receives a separate grade. In addition, students are required to have a Writing Center conference on a second essay. For all papers, students are encouraged to meet with me one-on-one.

When students hand in revised papers, they must include the original draft with the revised version, along with my typed sheet of suggested improvements for the first draft. In addition, they must submit a paragraph explaining how they have responded to the feedback on their original. They should explain both how they modified their papers to conform to my suggestions and why they decided *not* to accept some of those suggestions (if applicable).

I takes time in class to address common issues that she observes in the papers and to address student concerns about writing.

Peter Cannavo, Government:

I encourage students to submit drafts before the due date rather than doing rewrites. I've found that students often choose to not to rewrite their papers, but a lot of work and learning occurs during the drafting process. I try to give extensive comments and edits, using the "track changes". I feel it is my responsibility to help students figure out what constitutes good writing, content-wise and grammatically. For big classes, I generally allow only one draft submitted before the final draft, but for small classes (<20 students), I allow multiple drafts. I also encourage students to submit drafts of rewrites, because one rewrite may not teach the student to rethink material. I don't just want to see a rewrite; I'd rather work with the student through the process of rewriting to make sure they're on the right track.

Revisions can complicate the rewriting process. Sometimes it's difficult to tell if a mistake was the student's fault or an oversight/miscommunication on my part. I see papers as a learning process and want every student to do well, so I try to involve myself with every paper. Sometimes I encounter difficulties involving the clarity of my own comments. It's difficult to know what to do with mediocre papers--how do you improve a paper that's not terrible, but not particularly interesting, either? I used to have students respond directly to my comments on a separate sheet of paper, in addition to integrating their responses into their work, but now I just have them work their responses into the essay (less work for me and the student). I've also found that working with a student's drafts reduces the opportunity for plagiarism.

Benjamin Widiss, English and Creative Writing:

The core of my strategy regarding essay revision is the work I ask students to do on Blackboard throughout the term, which becomes an ongoing rehearsal for the work of writing and revision. I've experimented with a variety of formats, but have had most luck with requiring a weekly post (due the night before we meet) along these lines:

1. A passage from the week's text meriting, in your view, particular attention. The passage might be as short as a sentence, if you can make it speak fully enough, or as long as a paragraph.
2. A paragraph explaining what makes the passage important and intriguing, exploring how it works, and relating it to material in one of your peers' postings.
3. A larger question about the week's text, arising from your passage or not. This should be a question you don't yet feel capable of answering, but that you'd like to make progress on.

We'll work individually and as a group on refining the processes involved in selecting passages and unpacking their significance, and on arriving at the most productive larger questions. Your prose should (of course) be grammatically coherent, spell-checked, etc.—you need to communicate what you're saying clearly—but it can otherwise be casual and informal. Please do not sacrifice precision on the altar of ease, however. You may skip posting one week of your choice over the course of the term—let me know when you're doing so—but you may not turn any posts in late.

I dump all their posts into a Word document, and then respond to them using the “balloon” option in Track Changes. Once I've come up to speed (the second or third week of class), I can pepper a post with a bunch of caveats, questions, and compliments in a few minutes, meaning I can get through a seminar-sized class in an hour (which doubles as prep-time for the class, since I now know what's grabbed them in the text and what they are and aren't grasping). I typically take more time in the opening week(s), because I'm rusty and I want to clearly set my expectations for their Blackboard writing, and the parameters of my our implicit dialogue at the outset. In the remainder of the semester, I find there's less pressure with Blackboard to write in the most artful or succinct manner possible. But even this quick set of responses gives students ample material to reflect for class discussion and afterward, and points towards the kinds of deeper questions and responses I'm looking for in essays. I have found that this kind of feedback produces a marked increase in the perspicacity of the Blackboard posts over the semester.

I sometimes require, or make available the option of, building out from a Blackboard response to an essay. In this way students learn something about extending an initial intuition or a relatively localized argument to a broader and more nuanced claim. My reactions to their posts throughout the semester (I hope) model not just the ways I will respond to their formal writing, but also the kinds of thinking I'd like them to do—the kinds of dialogue they will increasingly be able to stage internally as they develop their arguments.

As their essays are more fully developed than their Blackboard posts, so too are my responses to the essays. My marginalia are a combination of affirmations, queries, and counter-arguments (and requests for clarification or elaboration of their ideas), but with more careful recourse to the text and to other parts of their own essays. I'm trying not just to reflect back to the student the extent of his or her accomplishments and the places where the essay falters, but also to help imagine the argument forward. My end comment will move from an initial set of statements as to what the essay does and where it is most successful to a discussion of ways it might be improved. I try to balance that between observations synthesizing marginal comments and a series of questions and suggestions—the questions more open-ended, the suggestions more vectored towards ways in which I suggest developing the argument, although I make it clear that the student is welcome to revise in another direction. When I remember to, I ask students to accompany their essays with short letters detailing what was most challenging/most rewarding about the writing, or what they think most and least successful about it, and what they would do next. I write end comments in dialogue with the students' impressions of their essays' accomplishments, limitations, and future trajectories.

As the semester goes on, I try to make students increasingly responsive to one another. I take time in class before and after essays are due to talk about the difficulties people have encountered and the resolutions arrived at, encouraging students to share their frustrations, their strategies for responding, and their epiphanies. In addition to yielding emotional support, and sometimes very simple and pragmatic suggestions, these conversations help strengthen students' ability to translate from the specifics of their individual endeavors to more abstract accounts of the writing (and thinking) process. I also often set up small writing groups (usually of three) in which students react to one another's essay proposals, or to full or partial drafts. The simplest mode for this is asking them to react with a series of "Yes, and" and "Yeah, but" statements—this obviously requires no prep time of the professor, and tends to work pretty well—but especially at lower levels it's helpful to elaborate a fuller structure of expectations and directions for response, e.g. underlining what they take to be the thesis statement *as well as* marking any sentence subsequently that they think best encapsulates what the essay does or should argue, squiggly lines where they're confused or concerned, questions where they think the essay needs to say more, and so forth. Students are often very acute with regard to their peers' writing even when they're struggling with exactly the same problems in their own, and sometimes the work of responding can be revelatory for them. Further, these revelations can, sometimes, be prodded forward by asking them to turn directly from reacting to their peers' writing to jotting down notes on anything they've learned that might be helpful for their own essays.