12

Teaching rewriting

How do I know what I think until I see what I say?

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Changing attitudes

For most students, *rewriting* is a dirty word. It's a punishment, a penalty for writing poorly. This notion gains strength when teachers insist that students correct mistakes in papers already graded or complete workbook exercises on writing problems in someone else's prose. Rewriting the *whole* paper, students believe, means they've failed the assignment. Rewriting remains an unpleasant chore for almost all writers, a process that confronts them with countless inadequacies in the draft and convinces them that words manipulate writers, not the other way around. Students rewrite their papers reluctantly for many reasons, as the following comments attest:

1. I wait until the last minute, so there's no time to rewrite.
2. My first draft is the best I can do. I can't improve it.
3. I don't know whether my first draft is any good or not, so how can I improve it?
4. I don't know where to begin, and I wouldn't know when to stop.
5. Well, frankly, I'm lazy.

6. When I tinker with my sentences, they just turn out worse.
7. I don't really care about what I'm writing, so I just want to get it over with.
8. Rewriting is too messy. I like to work with clean looking pages.
9. I'm such a bad writer I hate to read my own writing.
10. Rewriting is my instructor's responsibility.
11. Rewriting is painful. I can't stand the agony.
12. If I can't get it right the first time, I must be stupid.

(Diana Hacker and Betty Renshaw, *Writing with a Voice*, p. 26)

Most of these attitudes developed slowly, as students sat year after year in English classes where rewriting *was* a form of punishment, where the teacher's comments on papers rarely praised strengths or offered practical suggestions for addressing weaknesses, where students never had opportunities to draft several versions of an assignment before it was due. The techniques discussed in this chapter are meant to correct students' perceptions of rewriting-as-punishment, to encourage the view that rewriting remains crucial to composing, not an afterthought.

Many good writers spend considerably more time rewriting their work than drafting it. "I can't write five words," Dorothy Parker claims, "but that I change seven." Bernard de Voto insists that "the best reason for putting anything down on paper is that one may then change it." The changes we make in a draft are fairly simple; we add, delete, substitute, or rearrange material. But each adjustment requires judgment, making choices about what to keep and what to discard. We must decide, first of all, whether what we've written suits us, represents what we honestly want to say; then we must determine if a reader can make sense of it. From the students' perspective, this process poses several obstacles.

First, if neatness matters, as it has mattered ever since handwriting was graded in elementary school, students will be reluctant to mess up their drafts with changes. Second, if they mistakenly believe that some mysterious genius explodes clearly articulated, perfectly punctuated sentences onto a page, they'll hesitate to admit that their "genius" has failed them. On the other hand, if they've psyched out the teacher correctly on the first draft, the grade should be high without revising the paper. Third, if they've had no opportunities to prewrite the paper, to develop an overabundance of material, they'll be reluctant to tamper with the piece for fear of having to endure again the agony of finding something to say and making the words come out right. Finally, students conclude, rewriting doesn't matter much anyway. Their teachers neglect it, rarely demonstrating *how* rewriting works. They only occasionally request "corrections," schedule assignments so as to preclude time for rewriting, and harp on the disadvantages of scissors and paste.

According to Nancy Sommers, many student writers use rewriting

strategies different from those experienced writers employ. In "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Writers," she notes that students see rewriting primarily as rewording, approaching the process with what she calls a "thesaurus philosophy of writing": "The students consider the thesaurus a harvest of lexical substitutions and believe that most problems in their essays can be solved by rewording" (p. 381). They worry most about eliminating lexical repetition, are predominantly concerned about vocabulary, and delete or substitute words much more frequently than adding or reordering material. Although occasionally they reword the introduction or reorder ideas, they generally limit themselves to matters covered by editing rules. "At best the students see their writing altogether passively through the eyes of former teachers or their surrogates, the textbooks, and are bound to the rules that they have been taught" (p. 383).

Experienced writers, Sommers concludes, approach rewriting differently, much more concerned about finding the shape of the argument and about the reader's expectations. Although they make changes primarily at the level of the sentence (predominantly by addition and deletion), the changes encompass the whole composition and take several cycles to complete, each cycle embracing a different objective:

> The experienced writers see their revision process as a recursive process—a process with significant recurring activities—with different levels of attention and different agenda for each cycle. During the first revision cycle their attention is primarily directed towards narrowing the topic and delimiting their ideas. At this point, they are not as concerned as they are later about vocabulary and style. The experienced writers explained that they get closer to the meaning by not limiting themselves too early to lexical concerns. (p. 386)

Whereas early cycles concentrate on finding form, discovering the message, and clarifying ideas, later cycles focus on stylistic concerns. Yet even though each cycle may have a primary focus, experienced writers subordinate other concerns to it, keeping the whole in mind as they concentrate on its parts.

Sommers' work helps us redefine *rewriting* to include both revising and editing. When we want students to polish a text, to clean up misspellings, to change punctuation, to straighten out grammatical problems, we're asking them to edit, not revise, their work. Editing usually takes place during one of the later cycles Sommers describes. Revising, however, is not, as many textbooks proclaim, the last stage of composing. "Instead of thinking of revision as an activity at the end of the process, what if we thought of revision as a process of making a work congruent with what a writer intends—a process that occurs throughout the writing of a work?"[1] The composing process is not a

1. Nancy I. Sommers, "The Need for Theory in Composition Research," *College Composition and Communication* 30 (February 1979), 48. Sommers appears to use the term *revising* with the meaning I attach to *rewriting*; both of us agree that revising and rewriting amount to more than "editing," "proofreading," or "correcting" a text.

linear sequence of separable stages; prewriting, writing, and rewriting are concurrent activities, repeated over and over again as writers come progressively closer to resolving incongruities between what they intend to say and what the discourse actually says.

Let me illustrate some of the decisions writers must make by discussing several versions of the introductory paragraph for this chapter. Before I drafted it, I compiled a list of notes and decided roughly what I wanted to do: to present the students' perspective on rewriting. Once I've discussed why students hate rewriting, I reasoned, I can then explain what we can do about the problem. When I wrote the paragraph the first time, in pencil on a long, yellow, legal tablet, I got stuck in several places. Instead of erasing my words, as I usually do, I simply crossed through them so that you could see the changes I made. Here's that early version of Chapter 12's opening paragraph:

Rewriting -- a swear word in most English classes. Most
students consider it a punishment, fo a penalty for writing poorly
in the first place. Many teachers, bent on beating comma faults
out of their students ~~papers~~, require them to "~~correct~~" ~~missteps~~ submit
pages of corrections ~~complete for each essay or sentence~~ ~~as sentence~~
~~delinquents to complete~~ or to complete appropriate exercises in the
Composition handbook. ~~If writing represents in the minds of most~~
~~students writing itself~~ If writing seems painful, as it does for
most ~~people~~ students, surely rewriting prolongs and intensifies the agony.
~~Most~~ They remain ~~conf~~ convinced that, having ~~done their best work~~ ~~sweated out the~~
given the paper their best effort, there is no way to improve it by
revision. For almost all writers, rewriting is a frustrating chore,
~~a process that requires us to admit~~ ~~tempts us to admit th~~ ~~We~~ When we contemplate an almost alien draft, we
must admit that some of our ~~words~~ ideas ~~and words~~ refuse to ~~submit to~~ be governed by
~~our control~~ words; that we ~~haven't thought things through~~ ~~didn't intend to say this and left that point undeveloped~~, ~~that that~~
~~in some sense we have failed to communicate~~
~~didn't mean to say this and left that out~~, that in ~~some~~ many ways the
~~communication is flawed~~ writing has flaws. To protect ourselves from viewing our
mistakes as a personal failure, we construct defenses which
~~prevent~~ permit us to ignore the draft altogether. Listen to these

students as they rationalize their reluctance to rewrite
their papers:

A week later, after I'd drafted the entire chapter, I reread it. What especially displeased me about the first paragraph was its lack of focus. Although I had intended to present the students' perspective on rewriting, I shifted the focus several times from "rewriting" to "students" to "teachers" to "all writers/we" back to "students." I wasn't secure about my audience either. Although I wanted to communicate how students feel about rewriting papers, their teachers would be reading the book. Some readers surely would resent such phrases as "swear word" and "teachers bent on beating comma faults out of their students." Some would resent my aversion to handbook exercises. At the point in the paragraph where I've marked through "sweated out," I seem to have shifted my language to "talk up" to an audience of colleagues; words such as "contemplate," "alien," "be governed by," and "permit" represent, for me, a formal vocabulary, especially in a first draft. The last sentence didn't please me either. I needed a lead into the students' comments, but the alliterating *r*'s seemed too fancy.

Keeping these judgments in mind, I rewrote the paragraph. Again, instead of erasing options I'd discarded, I left them for you to see. The

Rewriting
~~Revision~~ has become a dirty word in most English classes. Most
students see it as a punishment, a penalty for writing poorly ~~badly~~ in the
first place. Many ~~Most~~ teachers reinforce this notion by asking students
to "correct the mistakes" in journals or on separate sheets of paper the
teacher will collect for ~~and~~ review. Some students are sentenced ~~Sometimes teachers assign~~
to complete exercises
~~exercises to teach~~ that mend their ways of missing commas ~~punctuating sentences~~.
Others ~~are~~ remain convinced that, having done the best they could
on the paper, there is no way to improve it by revision. It is
too much of a chore. Listen to their own typically ~~frustrating~~ ~~some of the typical attitudes~~
frustrated, honest ~~views~~ ~~reluctances~~ reasons for not rewriting ~~their~~ papers:
~~collected by Diana Hacker and Betty Renshaw:~~

second version is considerably shorter than the first, probably because I kept asking myself as I wrote, "What do *students* think about rewriting?" The last sentence gave me fits; for all my tinkering with it, I just couldn't get from my own paragraph to the quoted material. Changing "Most" to "Many" was necessary to avoid antagonizing my audience. Changing "Sometimes teachers" to "Some students" kept the focus of the paragraph on students (a deliberate passive construction helped). I changed "Revision," written too hastily, to "Rewriting" because the entire book organizes itself around words ending in *-writing*, a handy way to remember what the composing process entails.

Eight months later, when I rewrote the entire manuscript, I changed the paragraph again. Although the second version had persuaded me that I wasn't consciously alienating my readers, I wasn't pleased about the sentences. They were all about the same length and type. Comparing the first and second drafts of the paragraph also forced me to reconsider decisions I'd already made about my audience: "If I really don't think that 'correction exercises' help students," I thought, "I should say so honestly and explain why. If I've asserted throughout the book that teachers *and* students are writers, why not also make the point here?" The third version of my paragraph appeared in the first two editions of this book:

> For most students, *rewriting* is a dirty word. They see it as a punishment, a penalty for writing poorly in the first place. Many teachers reinforce this notion by insisting that students correct mistakes in papers already graded or complete workbook exercises on writing problems in someone else's prose. Rewriting the *whole* paper, students believe, means they've failed the assignment. For almost all writers, rewriting remains an unpleasant chore, a process which confronts them with countless inadequacies in the draft and convinces them that words manipulate writers, not the other way around. Students rewrite their papers reluctantly for many reasons, as the following comments attest:

In revising the chapter for this edition, I reviewed the paragraph again. It still didn't satisfy me because the focus wasn't clear. Sentence subjects shifted from *rewriting* to *They* (students) to *Many teachers* back to *Rewriting* and then to *Students* again. "Surely," I thought to myself, "you can realign the sentence subjects so that most of them emphasize rewriting, the subject of the chapter." So, I reordered sentence elements again and trimmed a little fat. That fourth version now appears at the beginning of the chapter.

As you read this book, many years after I wrote the first draft, you may see further revisions I could have made just in that one paragraph. Although days, months, and years separate the different versions, a luxury most student writers don't have, the rewriting process was cyclical. I began with a purpose but didn't discover my message or clarify my audience until I'd examined the second draft. Sentence

problems occupied my attention the second and third time I reviewed the paragraph, but I also addressed larger concerns, reconsidering my audience, my focus, and my own attitudes about teaching. In rewriting, then, as Sommers' research describes, writers review decisions they've made throughout the composing process. They redefine their purpose and audience, reassess the message, reshape the discourse, and realign their meaning with linguistic forms. For this reason, several strategies discussed earlier in the context of prewriting and writing reappear in this chapter. They serve to remind us that creating and recreating prose involve similar decisions.

Beyond redefining what rewriting entails, we also can encourage students to see it differently, dispelling some of their negative attitudes. We can adjust course schedules so that students have adequate time to plan, draft, and rewrite each assignment. At least one-third of our teaching should emphasize how writers rework drafts. We can discuss successive versions of novels, speeches, or other works by professional writers. We can encourage students to examine one another's drafts and together develop strategies for rewriting them. Students especially enjoy reworking their papers on word processors, in part because the terminal provides a clean copy of the text each time, in part because students have not yet learned to associate machine-edited texts with the teacher's red pen. We also can share our own writing with students, explaining problems we encountered and how we resolved them. This last suggestion is especially crucial for students who believe that writing is a magic talent peculiar to English teachers and novelists. Students need to see what rewriting looks like with all its false starts, messy pages, and momentary indecisions. My students have seen the several versions of this chapter's opening paragraph and reviewed with me the decisions I made. They're surprised to see how messy rewriting can be, but they also understand what choices writers must make and how to evaluate them. As long as I continue to let them see my work, they're willing to share theirs with other students.

Writing strategies applied to rewriting: finding the subject

Because prewriting decisions affect every element of a composition, writers must review them when they rewrite a draft. For example, Caroline, the student whose paper appears in Chapter 8 (p. 129), could write a stronger essay if she reinvented her draft, redefining her subject, her audience, and her purpose. Although she promises to discuss "exposures," she hasn't yet decided how or why they "mold the way a person will live." "Exposure" may simply be an empty, fancy word intended to impress the teacher-audience. Although she subdivides her topic into travel, changes in life style, and education, she hasn't developed enough details to demonstrate how these con-

temporary advantages differ from those available to her parents and grandparents.

She might begin reinventing her draft by brainstorming "travel" and/or "education," clustering the topic, or applying heuristic questions to a sentence such as "The most important influence on my life has been (*person or experience*)." Freewriting also might make her more comfortable with her subject; the first and last paragraphs are written in "Engfish," the pretentiously formal style some students think their English teachers want to read. Perhaps addressing the paper to a classmate or younger sibling would help. The point is that Caroline can't improve this version of her paper significantly by repairing the sentence fragment and correcting "ones'." She needs to find her message and a purpose for expressing it. Like most students, she needs to probe the subject again and develop new rhetorical strategies for developing it. Then, using a traditional outline, a block plan, or one of D'Angelo's paradigms, she can redefine the shape she wants to give her material.

Rewriting: finding the shape of discourse

The following essay, a description of Megan's bedroom, shows organizational problems. It needs reshaping.

> The Pink Bedroom
>
> This bedroom is unique. The dresser has handmade items that match each other and contain make-up. The bedspread on the canopy bed matches the wallpaper. Under the bed and in the closet are treasured items. The objects on the walls illustrate the accomplishments made during the years at school.
>
> The handmade items on the dresser are pink, and they match the pink and white striped wallpaper on three of the walls. These containers hold make up such as lotion, foundation base, powder, and lipstick. Also, the dresser is composed of a pink jewelry box. On either side of the jewelry box, consists a pink lamp. The dresser is white and has two drawers. This dresser is delicate and stays neat.
>
> The canopy bed is also white. The top of the canopy and the ruffle on the bottom of the bed matches the flower wallpaper that it faces, and the bedspread is white and quilted. On the inside of the top of the canopy is a red rose, that is attractive to look at while in the bed. A few pillows and collected dolls are set on the bed. The mattress is soft, and the bed is high off the ground. This bed is comfortable and makes a nice picture to look at.
>
> In different storage spots, numerous articles are found. Under the bed, boxes of letters and past schoolwork are kept. A scrapbook of different events that have happened is stored. In the closet, an array

> of clothing hangs and on the shelves collectors' items such as books, stamps, seashells, and coins are placed. A shoerack is also in the closet, so that shoes are neatly arranged. These items are in safe keeping in these different places.
>
> Several plaques are displayed on the walls. Certain frames contain witty sayings, and others show the awards that were received in school. Some of these awards were for photography, biology, and acceptance into the honor society. Also, on the wall is a picture of the Virgin Mary and a crucifix, which shows a dedication to the church. Each of these objects on the wall is special and has a purpose in being there.
>
> Overall, the room is neatly organized and delicate. Pink is the main color theme for the room, and the furniture is white. Several plaques and scrapbooks are selectively displayed in different parts of the room. The room is comfortable to live in, but it also makes an attractive picture for observers.

Megan generated plenty of details prior to drafting. She also had a plan for organizing the composition (although it wasn't an effective one). Outlining only the first three paragraphs of Megan's essay allows us to see that each sentence of the first paragraph establishes a general subtopic that subsequent paragraphs develop:

I. This bedroom is unique.
- A. The <u>dresser</u> has handmade items.
- B. The <u>bedspread</u> matches the wallpaper.
- C. <u>Treasured items</u> are stored under the bed and in the closet.
- D. <u>Plaques</u> hang on the walls.

II. <u>The items on the dresser</u> are pink.
- A. Several containers hold make up.
- B. There is a jewelry box.
- C. Pink lamps stand on either side of the dresser.
- D. The dresser is white.
- E. The dresser has two drawers.
- F. The dresser is delicate.

III. The <u>canopy bed</u> is white.
- A. The canopy and ruffle match the wall paper.
- B. The bedspread is quilted and white.
- C. A rose inside the top of the canopy is attractive to look at.
- D. Pillows and dolls are set on the bed.
- E. The mattress is soft.
- F. The bed is high off the ground.
- G. The bed is comfortable and nice to look at.

A major problem with this composition is attributable to the assignment, "Describe a person by describing his or her room." In all proba-

bility, Megan wasn't much interested in the topic, was reluctant to reveal herself, or wondered what purpose the teacher had in making such an assignment. Although she lists many details about her room, no "person" ever appears. She completes the paper only to satisfy the teacher.

On the other hand, she's organized the paper deliberately, listing her subtopics in the introductory paragraph. Because she has some sense of structure, reshaping the paper may be the best place to begin rewriting it. What would we tell her? First, the details in paragraph one aren't "unique," nor does she tell us her purpose for including them. She makes no promise to the reader that the rest of the paper can fulfill. The outline shows that she's merely listing "things" without linking them to a description of a person or supporting the "uniqueness" idea. The thesis, "This bedroom is unique," needs revising.

As Megan plans her next draft, she could ask herself some of the following questions about the outline: Do I really want to write about my room? If so, why begin with "dresser" and end with "plaques"? Is there a logic to moving around the room this way? What alternate description paradigms could I use? In what ways do the items I'm talking about reveal the kind of person I am? What's the purpose for each paragraph and how does it fulfill the promise I'm making at the beginning of my paper? Does each paragraph establish subordinate and coordinate relationships among its sentences? In answering these questions about the outline, Meagan will discover a problem in paragraph two, where II A–C specify items on the dresser while II D–F describe the dresser itself. Or she might see that paragraph three shifts the reader's attention spatially from the canopy to the ruffle to the bedspread back to the canopy to the pillows and dolls on the bedspread to the mattress to the floor. She can improve that order of details.

Sentence structure needs work too. Megan rarely subordinates word groups within sentences, a problem similar to the lack of confidence she shows in working out coordinate and subordinate relationships among sentences within paragraphs. But for now, Megan shouldn't worry about that, not until she's discovered what she wants to say about the bedroom, how to shape her message. She can concentrate on paragraphing and sentence structure in subsequent cycles of revision.

Outlining a draft can help students identify not only structural problems but also decisions about purpose and audience. As papers-in-miniature, outlines reveal where organizational tensions occur, where readers might get lost, where sections are skimpy, where details could be deleted, added, or rearranged. Outlines also may demonstrate that the draft doesn't address the assignment or fulfill its promise to a reader.

Rewriting: finding relationships in paragraphs

Attending to coordinate and subordinate relationships within and between paragraphs can become the goal of yet another rewriting cycle. As students work through the draft a second or third time, they might examine the density and forward movement of paragraphs. By diagramming a paragraph such as the one below, the student can see that it contains only two levels of generality, merely lists details, and establishes few subordinate relationships either within sentences or between them:

> 1 The inside of my jeep is filthy.
> 2 The ashtray hasn't been cleaned in weeks.
> 2 The floor is covered with corn and dirt from our farm.
> 2 The seats are dusty because I haven't driven it in months.
> 2 The ceiling has been spotted by beer and soda pop fights.

Ron did some prewriting, listing *ashtrays, floor, seats, ceiling* under the general heading "My jeep is filthy," but he didn't probe the subject much beyond that. Consequently, the draft only reproduces his prewriting list.

Fortunately, the draft eventually reveals Ron's purpose for discussing the jeep. In the last sentence of his essay, he writes, "Nevertheless, I'll never part with my jeep." Like many students, Ron wrote his way toward the point he wanted to make, which appears at the end of his draft rather than at the beginning, where a reader expects to find it. Ron intended to describe his jeep in such a way that its imperfections "nevertheless" increase its value. Keeping the "nevertheless" intention in mind, he can begin rewriting the paragraph. First, he must invent new material to point up the contrast between "filth that most people object to" and "filth that gives my jeep character." "If most people object to dirty ashtrays," he might ask himself, "why don't I?" After he has explored these contrasts, he must rework the sentences, incorporating more subordination to express the "nevertheless" relationship. The revised version looks like this:

> 1 Although most people think my jeep is filthy, I can't bring myself to clean it.
> 2 The ashtray hasn't been cleaned in weeks.
> 3 I won't empty it though because my parents won't let me smoke in the house, and when I'm in my jeep I can do what I want to.
> 2 The floor is covered with corn and dirt from our farm.
> 3 All the same, I haven't vacuumed it because I'm proud of being a country boy and don't mind carrying my turf around with me.
> 2 The seats stay dusty because I've had too much work to do after school lately to take the jeep out of the driveway.

2 The interior is a mess, the ceiling and upholstery spotted by beer and soda pop fights.

3 They remind me of all the good times I've had with my friends on weekends.

Although the paragraph could benefit from yet another revision to tighten sentences, at least now Ron's identified the relationships that hold the paragraph together. Furthermore, he's added reasons to support the bald statements in the first draft, decreased the distance between himself and his topic, and used the description of his filthy jeep to characterize himself. Rewriting has helped him clarify his purpose for the paper.

Some paragraphs require less substantial rewriting. Students can improve them by adjusting the topic or promise sentence, by adding, deleting, substituting, or reordering supporting details, by improving transitions, or by reorganizing sentences to take advantage of emphatic sentence position. In the following paragraph, the writer has established chains of equivalent terms to hold the paragraph together. These "equivalence chains" give readers recognizable signals for proceeding smoothly through the paragraph:[2]

> One of the functions of a society is to make its inhabitants feel safe, and Americans devote more of their time and collective resources to security than to any other need. Yet Americans do not feel safe, despite (or because of) shotguns in the closet and nuclear bombers patrolling overhead. With each decade we seem to accumulate more fears, and most of these fears seem to be about each other. In the fifties, we were afraid of Communists, and although we now feel sheepish about that moment of panic, we express today the same kinds of fear towards blacks and feminists; and in our reactions to all of these fears we have created some very real dangers.

Some paragraphs, however, can't be improved by removing irrelevant material, making sentence subjects similar, or establishing equivalence chains. The following paragraph already has consistent sentence subjects:

2. *Equivalence* is a technical term borrowed from structural linguists who study the linguistic features—the recurrence of words, parts of words, and phrases, for example—that give texts cohesion; see M. A. K. Halliday and Rugaiya Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (London: Longman, 1976). See also "Cohesion, Coherence, and Incoherence" in Marilyn M. Cooper and Michael Holzman, *Writing as Social Action* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1989), pp. 94–107.

> *Draft:* The store went out of business. It did not attract enough customers. It had a good location, but its merchandise was overpriced. Its salespeople were not helpful. (William Mahaney, *Workbook of Current English*, p. 293)

The problem here is short, choppy sentences. The paragraph reads like a randomly ordered list of facts. If the writer were to combine the sentences, he'd realize that he doesn't have enough material for a paragraph:

> *Revision:* The store went out of business, in spite of its ideal location, because its overpriced merchandise and rude salespeople drove customers away.

Now the "paragraph" has become a tight topic or promise sentence. By inventing additional material, the writer can develop a new paragraph that explains why the "overpriced merchandise" and "rude salespeople" put the store out of business.

Rewriting: finding sentence problems

Because most writers have enough trouble simply getting their ideas onto the page in an initial draft, they can't worry about polishing sentences the first time around. Writers who do may have difficulty completing a draft. Sentence work can come later, when the message is clearer and supporting evidence seems in place. That is when sentence combining, for example, will help rid sentences of deadwood and create varied prose rhythms. Moving through a draft, a few sentences at a time, gives students a chance to review relationships between sentences, embedding one sentence into another, revising punctuation, condensing piled up prepositional phrases into single modifiers, adding adverbs and adjectives, substituting action verbs for lifeless *be* and *have*, weeding out unnecessary passive constructions, reordering phrases, and undangling participles.

Rewriting sentences will be especially troublesome for students who believe that fancy vocabulary and wordiness define "good writing." Their prose may contain one-third to one-half "lard," a term Richard Lanham uses to characterize stylistic problems that not only lengthen sentences unnecessarily but also obscure meaning. To reduce the lard, he recommends that writers analyze their sentences using the "Paramedic Method":

1. Circle the prepositions.
2. Circle the "is" forms.
3. Ask, "Where's the action?" "Who's kicking who?"
4. Put this "kicking" action into a simple (not compound) active verb.
5. Start fast—no slow windups.

6. Write out each sentence on a blank sheet of paper and mark off its basic rhythmic units with a "/":
7. Read the sentence aloud with emphasis and feeling.
8. Mark off sentence lengths in the passage with a "/".

(*Revising Prose*, p. xiv)

Guided by this method, students can "get the lard out" by rewriting sentences such as the following:

> *Original:* This sentence is in need of an active verb.
> *Revision:* This sentence needs an active verb. (6 words instead of 9; lard factor = 33%) (*Revising Prose*, p. 3)
>
> *Original:* I think that all I can usefully say on this point is that in the normal course of their professional activities social anthropologists are usually concerned with the third of these alternatives, while the other two levels are treated as raw data for analysis.
> *Revision:* Social anthropologists usually concentrate on the third alternative, treating the other two as raw data. (15 words instead of 44; lard factor = 66%) (*Revising Prose*, p. 24)

Lard adds up when it accumulates over several sentences. Removing it is sometimes simply a matter of making every word count—and deleting words that don't:

> The opening paragraph is an important one. It should announce your topic and the restrictions and limitations that you yourself have placed upon that topic. It should make clear your point of view, your style, and your tone. Moreover, it should demonstrate your confidence and control, the assurance that you as author know exactly where you want to go and how you plan to get there. Sounds easy and obvious. And yet opening paragraphs—or, to be more precise, effective opening paragraphs are often the most difficult of all to sit down and write.

Finally, writers must devote one reading of the draft to proofreading and editing. Students who tend to overlook misspellings may spot them by reading their papers backward, beginning with the last word. Reading the paper aloud also helps identify stilted phrases or unreasonably convoluted sentences that went undetected earlier.

Approached as a series of purposeful cycles, rewriting requires several readings of a draft, each with a different emphasis. We read it first to evaluate our message and the relationships we're establishing among writer, reader, and subject. Then we read to test the overall organization, rediscovering our message and strengthening the relationships between inner parts and outer shape. In another reading, we examine paragraph structure; in another, sentence construction and diction. Finally, we clean up the surface features, attending to punctuation, mechanics, and spelling.

Although experienced writers can juggle two or three objectives si-

multaneously, students may need to move more slowly until they get the hang of it. Some students find it helpful to recopy the draft after attending to global concerns and structural problems, say, and before moving on to sentence revision and editing. Others are more comfortable making several passes through a draft on a word processor, each time attending to a different concern. Although students should feel free to prepare a clean text at any time, I wouldn't require them to recopy their papers for two reasons. First, although each reading may focus on a particular set of decisions, those decisions are intimately related to other choices the writer has made. As students examine individual paragraphs, for example, they necessarily must evaluate sentences, consider the overall organization, and determine if the paragraph realizes prewriting decisions about purpose and audience. Recopying drafts too often removes the evidence of these decisions and forces writers to spend considerable time reconstructing them if it turns out later that they were effective choices after all. Second, recopying drafts is boring and inefficient. It reduces the amount of time students devote to reviewing their work, lengthens the time between cycles, and prevents students from applying what they've learned in one reading to subsequent readings. Students need to recopy drafts only when it helps to record on a clean page the changes made during one cycle before going on to the next. Several purposeful *readings* of the draft are necessary; endless drafts aren't. With practice, students can complete the cycles of rewriting in the second or third draft.

Writing workshops

We can promote careful attention to rewriting in several ways. My students turn in all of their drafts when they submit final copies of their papers. I don't grade their scratch work and drafts, but looking them over helps me determine what rewriting strategies students find useful and which ones they're avoiding. From time to time, I copy a "before" and "after" version of a student's paper to illustrate what messy, thoughtful rewriting looks like.

Commenting on drafts, rather than final papers, is also helpful. When we write comments on drafts or discuss them with students in conference, writers can benefit from our opinions and suggestions. They still have time before the assignment is due to take our feedback into account. Because we will discuss written responses to students' writing in the next chapter, we won't go into the subject in detail here. But for my money, commenting on drafts makes more sense than commenting on final versions. If we're going to spend the time it takes to offer students sound advice, let's offer it when it does some good, when students are still working on a project, not after it's finished.

We also can turn our classes into writing workshops. When the first edition of this book appeared, writing workshops were new. Now they

are standard practice. Letting students help one another develop and rewrite their papers has several benefits.[3] Writing workshops insure that students compose papers in stages, not the night before they are due. They allow students to exchange solutions to writing problems and become responsible for their own learning. They provide an audience other than the teacher and immerse students in a community of readers and writers. Students in workshop settings see a great deal more writing than they would in a traditional writing class. As they give one another advice and use it to develop their own messages, they learn relatively quickly what good writing is. Good writing is no longer a matter of psyching out the teacher or conforming to standards in a handbook. It is writing that readers, including classmates, find interesting and effective. Writing workshops give teachers new roles too. We stop being lecturers and become enablers, planning activities to help students learn from one another, monitoring students' work, offering help when it's requested, and evaluating the effectiveness of groupwork.

To be effective, writing workshops need careful planning. For one thing, students aren't accustomed to working in groups. They're used to sitting passively or competing against one another for grades. Initially, students need explicit instructions for using their time in groups constructively. Second, when students "play teacher," they often adopt the hypercritical, authoritative tone of the comments they're read on their papers. They need guidance in giving constructive advice, even a language for offering helpful feedback. To encourage responsible collaboration, we must structure groupwork carefully, assign manageable tasks, and state our expectations clearly, at least until students have learned to work together. Although teachers can organize workshops several ways, the following suggestions offer a useful place to begin:

1. Divide the class into heterogeneous groups of five to seven students, ensuring that each group is as diverse as possible with respect to gender, race, age, and writing ability. Groups smaller than five sometimes mean that one student alone must arbitrate disagreements; groups larger than seven often develop cliques. Encourage students to get to know group members through risk-free in-class assignments that build trust. Once students seem comfortable talking with one another, keep the groups together for the entire term. If personality conflicts arise, help the groups resolve them instead of shuffling students (and problems) around. Realigning the groups means that students must get to know one another all over again.

3. For a discussion of how writing workshops encourage active learning, see Kenneth A. Bruffee, "The Brooklyn Plan: Attaining Intellectual Growth through Peer-Group Tutoring," *Liberal Education* 64 (December 1978), 447–68. Donald Murray also advocates the approach throughout his book, *A Writer Teaches Writing*, 2d ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), especially in Chapter 9.

2. Give the groups specific work to do and define it concretely. Begin with brief tasks taking perhaps ten or fifteen minutes. As students become more experienced, workshop tasks can expand to twenty or thirty minutes (workshops lasting longer than half an hour can begin to be unproductive). The first time, for example, students might read the entire paper but examine only the first paragraph in detail, rewriting the introduction together to clarify the writer's promise. Or students might choose a paragraph that looks skimpy, writer and reader helping each other generate additional support. Begin with the concrete words on the page and ask students to apply one or two rewriting strategies at a time. Later on, the groups can focus on whole compositions and more abstract concerns of purpose, audience, and message. Sometimes, it helps to duplicate instructions for workshop activities so that every student has a copy. The Framework for Judging (p. 123) is a useful, flexible list. Early in the term, students might review one another's drafts by responding only to the first two or three sets of questions from the framework. Later on, they might use all of the questions, taking longer to write down and discuss their responses. An important strategy for getting workshops off to a constructive start is focusing on something other than punctuation and grammatical problems. Rewriting involves more than editing, a principle you want to establish early on.

3. Give students a language for discussing their work. In the beginning, they won't know what to ask one another or how to express their impressions of a classmate's draft. So before the workshop gets underway, demonstrate the activity with the whole class, modeling the kinds of issues you want discussed and the talk you expect to hear. Illustrate the task by discussing a student's draft or examples taken from students' previous work. In the early part of the term, it helps to let writers talk first, explaining their intentions and setting the agenda for the kind of help they want. You may want to write some conversation starters on the board so that students can refer to them during groupwork. Here are some examples:

> *Writer:* "The main point I wanted to get across in this paragraph was . . . ."
> "What do you still need to know that I haven't told you?"
> "My biggest worry about this paper is . . . ."
>
> *Reader:* "The best thing about this paper is . . . ."
> "What part of the paper gave you the most trouble?"
> "As a reader, the part of your paper that most confused me was . . . ."

Workshops early in the term should begin with the writer's explanation of some strategy or problem in the draft. When the writer speaks first, the reader must postpone the impulse to suggest, "You should have done thus and so." Discussions also should begin by noting

strengths, using them to improve weak sections of the paper. When writers or readers identify a problem, they should explain *why* it's a problem and *how* to solve it. Otherwise, the workshop deteriorates into fault finding rather than problem solving.

By about the middle of the term, students will have gained confidence in giving and receiving advice and will understand its value in improving the final draft. Now's the time to ensure that advice is rigorous. Continue modeling workshop tasks, perhaps previewing a handout of four to six questions you have prepared. Reverse the turn taking and ask readers to speak first, explaining a problem they see and helping the writer solve it. Writers should be less fragile by this time and need to hear where and why a draft confuses a reader. Workshops should involve more than talk. Students can read a draft and write a paragraph about it before discussing it with the writer. Or they might write responses to questions you have given them on a handout. Talk is useful, but writers can take written responses home with them to consult as they rewrite the draft. If necessary, duplicate sample responses to discuss with the class so that students can learn how to give better advice.

4. Monitor the groups to make sure students use their time productively and phrase comments constructively. Make one relatively quick pass through the class in the first few minutes of an activity to be sure all students understand what they are supposed to do. Students who have no draft should sit slightly apart from the group and write one; excluding them from the activity usually ensures that they will be prepared next time. Once everyone has begun working, spend some time observing each group, standing near the group but able to see most of the class as well. Listen carefully to the kind of talk going on, intervening only when a group seems uncertain about what it's supposed to be doing or is obviously wasting time. When students request "teacher's opinion," avoid giving it. Respond instead with a question that helps the group examine the draft more closely or enables students to arbitrate the issue themselves. In this way, you wean them from seeing you as the only authority and encourage them to become independent critics of their own prose. If you intervene in groupwork too often, you wind up teaching several classes instead of just one and deprive students of opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. Later in the term, you may decide to observe the groups less frequently, but don't assume that groupwork gives you a "free period." Use the time to read over students' shoulders or to give special help to students who need it.

Planned carefully, writing workshops realize the primary objective of a writing course: students and teachers writing, reading, discussing, and improving one another's work. Although students need practice learning how to work together and guidance in evaluating drafts effectively, workshops are one of the best ways to teach students to become

independent critics. Many students regard workshops as one of the most helpful features of a writing course. Even teachers who prefer more traditional course designs still find groupwork helpful, especially when scheduled a few days before a paper is due. Then students seem most receptive to constructive comments on drafts and most likely to incorporate specific suggestions in rewriting the paper. Students who typically postpone drafting until the night before an assignment deadline may still write their drafts the night before "workshop day," but they'll also have a few more days to rewrite it prior to the deadline. At first, we must direct their work closely, cutting off escape routes and making rewriting more attractive than calling the first draft "finished." In time, however, rewriting becomes less novel, a more natural stage of composing, a way of insuring that final drafts represent the students' best work.

Student-generated criteria

Rewriting calls attention to the criteria for good writing. All teachers (or their surrogates, the textbooks) spend some time enumerating the qualities of effective papers. The discussion usually remains pretty one-sided though, the teacher like Moses delivering the ten commandments of acceptable English prose. Instead of legislating these stylistic do's and don't's, we can encourage the class to develop its own guidelines. It takes time, and we'll have to pose questions about areas students have overlooked, but in the long run, student-generated criteria have several advantages. First, they allow us to change roles. Instead of acting as lawgivers and rule enforcers, we become advisors, helping students define and attain standards that the class, not the teacher, has established. To be sure, teachers have an obligation to make clear the standards by which student writing will be judged, but unless students can anticipate what constitutes a successful response to an assignment, they will continue to write poorly, in our classes and in other courses. Second, when students develop their own definitions of "good writing," they become better at solving writing problems. Teacher or textbook criteria often limit a student's practical understanding of writing principles. Student-generated criteria express principles of good writing in language students understand, weaning them from the security they seek (and unfortunately, have come to expect) by asking us, "What do you want in this paper?"

The hidden agenda, of course, is that students will develop criteria similar to those we'd use anyway. We communicate our expectations implicitly and explicitly in every class meeting, as we teach, as we explain workshop and in-class activities, as we guide students in discussing their papers with one another. Student-generated criteria merely synthesize class discussion and record generalizations students infer from examining one another's work. Generating criteria for good

writing can be as complicated as developing a rubric for each assignment, a process discussed in Chapter 14, or as simple as building a checklist. The checklist reproduced below was not generated all at once. It developed gradually, throughout the course, as students discussed assignments, sample papers, and one another's drafts. From time to time, we ended class discussion or a writing workshop by defining additional principles to add to the list. Although no two classes will develop identical lists, the one below frames its criteria as questions intended to guide rewriting:

Subject, Audience, Purpose

1. What's the most important thing I want to say about my subject?
2. Who am I writing this paper for? What would my reader want to know about the subject? What does my reader already know about it?
3. Why do I think the subject is worth writing about? Will my reader think the paper was worth reading?
4. What verb explains what I'm trying to do in this paper (*tell a story, compare X and Y, describe Z*)?
5. Does my first paragraph answer questions 1–4? If not, why not?

Organization

6. How many specific points did I make about my subject? Did I overlap or repeat any points? Did I leave any points out or add some that aren't relevant to the main idea?
7. How many paragraphs did I use to talk about each point?
8. Why did I talk about them in this order? Should the order be changed?
9. How did I get from one point to the next? What signposts did I give the reader?

Paragraphing (Ask these questions of every paragraph)

10. What job is this paragraph supposed to do? How does it relate to the paragraph before and after it?
11. What's the topic idea? Will my reader have trouble finding it?
12. How many sentences did it take to develop the topic idea? Can I substitute better examples, reasons, or details?
13. How well does the paragraph hold together? How many levels of generality does it have? Are the sentences different lengths and types? Do I need transitions? When I read the paragraph out loud, did it flow smoothly?

Sentences (Ask these questions of every sentence)

14. Which sentences in my paper do I like the most? The least?
15. Can my reader "see" what I'm saying? What words could I substitute for *people, things, this/that, aspect,* and so forth?
16. Is this sentence "fat"? (Apply the "Paramedic Method.")
17. Can I combine this sentence with another one?
18. Can I add adjectives and adverbs or find a more lively verb?

Things To Check Last

19. Did I check spelling and punctuation? What kinds of words do I usually misspell? What kinds of punctuation problems did I have in my last paper?
20. How does my paper end? Did I keep the promises I made to my reader at the beginning of the paper?
21. When I read the assignment again, did I miss anything?
22. What do I like best about this paper? What do I need to work on in the next paper?

Students need to view rewriting as more than editing, polishing, or proofreading, as more than correcting flaws in papers we've already graded. Although a draft represents an initial attempt to express a message, most writers don't find its meaning and form until they've reviewed the draft. Students need time to let their compositions grow. They need to examine every level of the discourse, review the decisions they made, and incorporate responses from teachers and other students. They may rewrite the piece several times until they're satisfied that it says what they mean. But so must all writers, even talented ones such as Hemingway, who revised the last page of *Farewell to Arms* thirty-nine times before it suited him. Hearing that, an interviewer asked him, "Was there some technical problem there? What was it that had you stumped?" "Getting the words right," he replied.