Handouts

Teaching Revising and Editing Skills

Gateway Resource TRES0001

General Guidelines for Revising and Editing Essays

These general guidelines apply to writing a variety of genres or text types in the content areas. The guidelines are designed to help students become thoughtful and process-oriented, rather than product-oriented, readers and writers. The guidelines are not meant as a strict sequence for revising or editing essays and other forms of writing (e.g., reports, research papers, summaries).

Make Revision a Priority and a Routine Part of Content Area Writing

Teach students the importance of revision:

- Emphasize that all writers revise their writing to improve the content (i.e., the development of ideas, organizational structure, and connections between ideas).
- Clarify that revision does not mean recopying in neater handwriting, running a spell-check, or changing a few words.

Identify and focus on one area or element to revise at a time, rather than trying to fix everything that is wrong:

- Too much information at one time can be overwhelming.
- Make sure that students improve in the focus area before moving on.
- Shorter, more focused revisions help students build a complete set of revision skills over time.

Read and talk about mentor texts to emphasize strong writing and to show how writers do what you are asking your students to learn to do:

- Show how a specific element is effectively used in different types of text.
- Discuss what makes a text strong.
- Create and/or share a list of elements specific to that genre that can guide students' thinking.
- Establish expectations that students use the proper terminology and academic diction appropriate to your discipline.

Teach students how to use specific revision strategies by modeling the process:

- Modeling revision makes students less resistant to change what they have written.
- Show how revision affects the reader and helps the writer grow.
- Use teacher and student samples when modeling.
- Model by thinking aloud; clearly explain what you are thinking as you wrestle with how to revise and improve a specific part.
- Think through your revision options and how to determine the best way to "fix" an identified element.
- Show how to go through multiple rounds of revision for a single piece of writing—but with a different focus (identified element) each time.

Teach Editing Skills

Teach and assess writing conventions—it is the responsibility of all teachers in every content area:

- Establish expectations that students proofread and edit spelling, grammar, usage, punctuation, sentence structure, and capitalization when they write in your content area class.
- Teach specific conventions, one at a time, that your students struggle with in their writing.
- Focus on conventions frequently used in your discipline. Use model sentences from mentor texts.
- Have students think about how they can use specific conventions in their own writing.
- Clarify the differences between writing conventions for informal electronic communication (e.g., blogs, e-mail, text messages) and the more traditional writing styles and conventions (e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation) of professional and academic contexts.
- Communicate and share with your colleagues any pervasive convention errors and collaborate to address them. Share rubrics and strategies for correct use of written conventions.

Create a Positive Environment of Respect, Trust, Support, and Encouragement

Make time for students to revise and edit their writing during class, so you can monitor and support their thinking about content and their writing skills:

- Circulate around the room. Stop and hold brief (1- to 2-minute) conferences with individual students or groups. Ask key questions: "What are you working on?" "What help do you need?"
- Focus on only one or two aspects of the content or a specific writing skill that could be improved. Use sticky notes to quickly record student focus areas and interactions.
- When providing written feedback on student writing, use a conversational tone. Comment on strong aspects and target one or two areas that need revision or editing. Address both content knowledge (focus, organization, purpose) and writing conventions (grammar, punctuation, spelling).
- For formal writing assignments, incorporate rubrics and revision guides for the writing genres and assignments in your discipline. Teach students how to use the tools before, during, and after writing. Use the criteria to evaluate and provide written and verbal feedback about student writing.
- Set aside class time for students to collaborate as they revise and edit with a partner or small group (peer conferences). Explicitly teach students the procedures and appropriate ways to respond by modeling how to read others' writing, discuss the writing, and provide constructive feedback.
- Have students attach their revisions and edits to the original draft. It is unnecessary to rewrite an entire piece until a final copy is turned in.
- To motivate students to write well (and focus on revision and editing), provide opportunities for students to share (publish and present) their work in a variety of forms and venues.

Sources:

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General Guidelines for Teaching Peer Conferencing

These general guidelines apply to writing a variety of genres or text types in the content areas. The guidelines are designed to help students become thoughtful and process-oriented, rather than product-oriented, readers and writers. The guidelines are not meant as a strict sequence for peer conferences.

Peer Conferences

A peer conference is the process of students working collaboratively to improve their writing. Peer conferences can be used at any stage of writing, but they are most commonly associated with revising and editing.

Revising involves working with the organization and development of ideas to clarify, strengthen, and improve the overall clarity and coherence of writing. Editing typically occurs after the content has been revised and focuses on improving capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and academic language conventions.

Peer Conferencing Procedures and Appropriate Feedback

For this process to be effective, provide **explicit instruction** in peer conferencing procedures and reviewer etiquette and make peer conferencing an established part of the routine for content area writing assignments. Do not just put students in groups and tell them to read and respond to one another's writing.

Peer conferences can be organized in different ways—as responses between partners, in small groups (three to four students), or with the whole group.

Model the peer conferencing process and how to appropriately respond by giving constructive, helpful feedback. Display a sample teacher- or student-written essay or other form of writing for the class.

Teach students what to focus on as they carefully read (not skim) and review their peer's writing. Review their purpose for writing and the elements of the specific writing genre.

Provide a set of critiquing guidelines, such as questions, elements, or steps, to follow to help students focus on particular aspects of the writing as they read and review one another's writing. For example, the questions on the **peer conferencing tools** provided with this resource help students focus on particular elements and aspects in a personal narrative, expository essay, or persuasive essay.

One or two focus questions related to the specific topic or assignment can also be given. For example, if students are defending whom they would vote for in an upcoming election, a question could be: "Has the writer included three convincing reasons for his or her choice?"

In addition, establish a **basic response or feedback protocol** for students to use when they respond to one another's writing, no matter the genre. A protocol provides a structure for peer conferences and builds confidence as well as skills and knowledge to improve writing. A protocol helps students learn how to respond in a respectful and supportive way.

For example, the peer reviewer could read the writing and note the following:

1. Something positive (strength)
2. One or two things to improve (problem areas)
3. Suggestions the writer might try (action statements)

Then, when the peers confer, the reviewer could provide feedback on each point to help the writer improve the organization or development of ideas.

Praise, question, and polish is an example of this type of protocol. The adapted version below helps students when they work together to revise content. It involves the three types of feedback.

1. Praise: Point out a positive quality of the writing or something you like. Be sure to explain why you like it. Be honest—do not say something works if it does not.

Sample sentence stems to scaffold student responses include the following:

- "_____ is very effective because _____."
- "I really liked the way you _____ because _____."
- "In this part, I think you used a lot of good _____."
- "My favorite part was _____ because _____."
- "This was really fun to read because _____."

2. Question: Identify a specific problem (something that is confusing or needs more explanation) and give a reason why a change is needed. Then, ask a question to help the writer revise (clarify or elaborate). Be specific and sensitive.

Sample sentence stems to scaffold student responses include the following:

- "I am not sure I understand this part that I underlined because _____. What else could you tell me?"
- "In this paragraph, I need more information about _____." What could you add?
- "I do not see how this idea relates to your thesis because _____." Why did you include it? "
- "This part was not clear because _____. Would you tell me more about _____?"
- "Why did you say _____? What does it have to do with _____?"

3. Polish: Offer one or two suggestions (a plan that gives the writer a specific direction for revision).

Sample sentence stems to scaffold student responses include the following:

- "If you add more details after this sentence, it would help to clarify _____."
- "Instead of using the word _____, maybe you can use another word like _____ to better [describe explain, define, illustrate, express, or persuade] _____."
- "One suggestion I can offer for improvement is _____."
- "You might want to expand on _____."
- "You might consider changing the order of _____."

Monitoring Peer Conferences

Hold students accountable for their performance as both a writer and peer reviewer of essays. As peer reviewers, they should be respectful and provide concrete and specific feedback. As writers, they should concentrate, listen, and be open and receptive—not defensive—to advice.

Circulate, ask questions, offer suggestions, and listen as students confer about their writing. Coach students through the process and help them use feedback to improve their writing.

Monitor students' progress by jotting down your thoughts and observations (e.g., their effectiveness as a peer reviewer, participation and involvement). For example, record your observations by using a clipboard, a chart listing students' names, and sticky notes.

Additional Peer Conferencing Strategies

Reverse outlining is a strategy that writers can use before they meet with peers to confer about their writing. Reverse outlining helps the writer focus on the development and progression of ideas. Students reread their own writing and focus on whether their ideas are clearly related to the topic.

Reverse outlining includes the following steps:

- Read the writing one paragraph at a time.
- Write a sentence in the margin that summarizes the point you have made in each paragraph.
- Look through each summary sentence and ask yourself whether it is relevant to your thesis and strengthens the development of your ideas. Determine whether there are any unnecessary tangents (development is off topic).

In the end, you should have a good idea about what you say in your essay and where you say it.

Students can use an **editing mini-chart** to edit their own essay and/or confer with their peers to improve their written conventions. Editing mini-charts list areas for students to review and edit.

Self-editing encourages students to evaluate specific features of their own writing, increasing their self-awareness of writing conventions. Peer editing heightens the awareness of various print and grammatical conventions for the peer editor and the writer.

An example of an editing mini-chart that involves both self-editing and peer editing can be found at www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printouts/editing-checklist-self-peer-30232.html.

The **fishbowl technique** can be used in a variety of ways in content area classrooms. The technique involves inner and outer circles of students. The students in the inner circle (fishbowl) discuss a topic or complete a task. The rest of the class is seated in an outer circle (or concentric circles) outside of the fishbowl. Their role is to watch, listen, and follow along. These students do not participate until the inner circle is finished. Then the class discusses the process. Key points are noted and summarized.

The fishbowl technique is an excellent way to introduce and teach peer conferencing procedures, activities, and protocols. The inner circle, which may include the teacher, demonstrates or role plays the process while the rest of the class watches. The process is then discussed, questions are answered, and clarifications are made to help students understand how to work together to improve their writing.

For example, one way to teach students how to use the sample editing mini-chart discussed on the previous page is to use the fishbowl technique, allowing the class to see both a self-editing and peer-editing session.

- Give each student a copy of a sample (teacher-written) essay or other form of writing. Then, display the editing mini-chart on a document reader or overhead projector. Model the self-editing phase by working through the items on the mini-chart as students observe. Or select a student who has a good understanding of the conventions on the mini-chart to model this phase.
- After the self-editing demonstration phase is complete, discuss the process with students.
- Choose another student to serve as the peer editor for the piece of writing that was just self-edited. Have the person who conducted the self-editing phase and the reader (peer editor) sit in the middle of the class, so that all students can see and hear them as they work through this collaborative phase of the editing process.
- Discuss the process and how this type of editing can help both the writer and reader (peer editor) improve their writing.

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ReadWriteThink. (2013). *Editing checklist for self- and peer editing*. Retrieved from http://www.readwritethink.org

Virgil Undergraduate Writing Center. (2001–2005). [Website no longer active.]

Peer Conferencing Tool for Expository Essays

Name of Writer: Date:

Name of Reviewer: Date:

Directions to the Reviewer

Read the draft. Make suggestions for improvement. Be specific. Consider the questions listed below. Jot down notes for your conference with the writer. Be prepared to share your responses.

What is the writer's purpose? Is it clear?

Is the topic too large to cover in this essay? If so, how can the writer narrow the topic and clearly define and sustain the thesis?

Does the introduction make me want to read the rest of the essay? If not, why?

Are the ideas presented logically and easy to follow? Is the organizational pattern clear? If so, what is it?

Could the writer strengthen sentences to connect ideas at the sentence and paragraph levels? Does the writer effectively use transitions or need to add more?

Do you wish the writer had included more information in some places? If so, where?

Does the writer use interesting, specific supporting details that add substance to the essay? What types of details (e.g., facts, reasons, examples, comparisons) provide evidential support?

Does the writer show, rather than tell, to explain the topic? If so, where?

Could parts be left out (extraneous information)? If so, where?

Could the writer have used more purposeful and precise language? If so, what words do you suggest?

Do you find any parts confusing? If so, what parts?

Does the conclusion bring closure to the essay? Does the writer give you a lasting impression?

Does the essay include a variety of sentence types?

What do you like best about the expository essay? Why?

What could the writer do to most improve this essay?

Are there spelling and grammatical errors?

The Whole Family Under One Roof?

Introduction

A Victorian family circa 1860 (Hulton Archive/Getty Images)

If you're like many Americans, you have just spent a few days in close quarters with your parents, grandchildren, siblings, etc. You're ready to go home, or ready for them to go home. But for a growing number of families in which adult children can't afford to live on their own, this is the new normal.

These "boomerang" children have been the butt of jokes on late-night television and even in commercials, but what's so bad about moving back in with your parents? Could extended families under one roof — a common arrangement in years past — be the way of the future?

The Only Faithful Human Institution

John L. Graham *is a professor of business at the University of California, Irvine. He is the co-author with Sharon Graham Niederhaus of "Together Again: A Creative Guide to Successful Multigenerational Living."*

December 27, 2011

I live on a cul-de-sac in Irvine, Calif., that includes eight 2,500-plus-square-foot homes. When we moved into the neighborhood 27 years ago, six of those homes included two baby-boom parents with children and two couples with empty nests. Now there are no longer children on our street, although adult kids are still living in two of the homes. In my house we now have three spare bedrooms — we keep the doors and the heating vent shut to conserve energy.

Houses like mine are a root of the current world financial crisis. In 2006, housing prices in the United States began to crash. That's about when our last daughter left for college. Our house, along with millions of others across the country, literally became worth less when the last kid moved out. The demand for big houses declined even while the new home builders were madly adding more square feet. Circa 2012 housing in the U.S. has lost about a third of its value, down from $25 trillion to $16 trillion by some estimates. This sharp decline in value of the American housing stock has catalyzed a worldwide restructuring of our economic systems. And just wait until 2020 when the full burden of baby-boomer retirement and decrepitude is recognized.

The cure for this demographic disaster is the pooling of resources across generations that we are already seeing in America. The idea of the nuclear family is now obviously obsolete. We are all reverting to the old reliance on the extended family that anthropologist Margaret Mead correctly described as the only faithful human institution. The government won't be there to help on this one. Boomerang kids are actually a blessing in disguise. They're allowing us to relearn how to live in multigenerational arrangements as humans almost always have. Yes, the lessons for balancing proximity and privacy are tough, but such learning is essential for all of us in the 21st century.

I'm Not Seeing a Boomerang

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December 26, 2011

One of the stories parents like to tell ourselves is that our young adult children want to move back in with us. Our 20-somethings are referred to as the Boomerang Generation, noted for their failure to launch. There is just one problem with the story of the Boomerang Generation: It is not true.

Census data show that what is really new about young adulthood is the percentage of young adults who live on their own. From 1880 to 1970 the percentage of U.S. born women in their twenties who lived on their own (not with parents and not with a husband) was always less than 15 percent. By 1980, the percentage of young adult women who lived on their own had risen to 27 percent, and to 33 percent in 1990, to 39 percent in 2000, and to 42 percent today. The delay of marriage and the extension of singleness can make it appear as if young people are more likely to return to the parental nest. If one examines single people in their twenties, who are the people who have the option of living with their parents, the percentage who live with their parents is now about 45 percent. That may seem high but it isn't: in the past single people in their 20s nearly always lived with their parents.

The Great Recession has actually had no effect whatsoever on the percentage of young adults living with their parents in the United States. This is not so surprising; the (even greater) Great Depression did not affect family structure much, and neither did the Industrial Revolution. Family structure changes slowly over time. Economic ups and downs have little effect on who lives with whom.

A Sensible Use of Spare Rooms

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December 27, 2011

The direct consequence of the turn of the century residential building boom is that now, in 2012, there are a lot of spare rooms in all those houses. Indeed, the chances are the greatest in the last 50 years that an adult family member is now living in your spare bedroom.

Multigenerational living is ahead for all of us. Baby boomers will be living with their kids as they begin to experience the infirmities of old age. By 2020 they'll need help with their disabilities, and the most sensible helpers will be members of the extended family living close by. The practice now of living together as adults across generations will be a big help.

Boomerang kids and baby boomers are learning about the balancing act between proximity and privacy that will be required in the modern families of the remainder of this century. Both physical structures and financial arrangements are being developed to accommodate such changes. For example, approximately one-third of American homes can be remodeled to include an accessory apartment with a separate kitchen and entrance. The major home builders have finally begun to experiment with such designs as well. Cross-generational financial agreements are burgeoning including shared real estate investments and adult children moving back home while saving money to repay college loans (which are exempt from bankruptcy proceedings).

Extended family members are already creatively designing a new future in these tough times. Indeed, now is the time to get ready for the coming changes in the American family.

Source: Multiple authors. (2011, December 26). The whole family under one roof? *The New York Times*. Reprinted with permission.

Peer Conferencing Tool for Personal Narratives

Name of Writer: Date:

Name of Reviewer: Date:

Directions to the Reviewer

Read the draft. Make suggestions for improvement. Be specific. Consider the questions listed below. Jot down notes for your conference with the writer. Be prepared to share your responses.

What is the writer's purpose? Is the writer able to communicate the significance or importance of the experience?

Is the topic too large to cover in this essay? If so, how can the writer narrow the topic and clearly define and sustain the central idea?

Does the introduction make me want to read the rest of the essay? If not, why?

Are the ideas presented logically and easy to follow? Could the writer strengthen sentences to connect ideas? Could the writer add transitions?

Are the characters interesting? Does the writer use an appropriate amount of dialogue? Where does the writer need to improve character descriptions?

Does the writer use sensory details to describe the setting? How can the writer strengthen the setting description?

Does the writer use interesting, specific details that add substance and contribute to the portrayal of the experience? Does the writer show, rather than tell about, this experience? If so, where?

Could parts be left out? If so, where?

Could the writer have used more purposeful and precise language? If so, what words do you suggest?

Did you find any parts to be confusing? If so, what parts?

Does the conclusion bring closure to the essay? Does the writer give you a lasting impression of the personal experience and/or insight?

Does the essay include a variety of sentence types?

What do you like best about the personal narrative? Why?

What could the writer do to most improve this essay?

Are there spelling and grammatical errors?

Peer Conferencing Tool for Persuasive Writing

Name of Writer: Date:

Name of Reviewer: Date:

Directions to the Reviewer

Read the draft. Make suggestions for improvement. Be specific. Consider the questions listed below. Jot down notes for your conference with the writer. Be prepared to share your responses.

What is the writer's purpose? Is it clear?

Is the topic too large to cover in this essay? If so, how can the writer narrow the topic and clearly define and sustain the thesis?

Does the introduction make me want to read the rest of the essay? If not, why?

Are the ideas presented logically and easy to follow? If not, what would improve the organization?

Could the writer strengthen sentences to connect ideas at the sentence and paragraph levels? Does the writer effectively use transitions or need to add more?

Do you wish the writer had included more information in some places? If so, where?

Does the writer use specific reasons and supporting evidence to defend the position or claim? What evidential support (e.g., facts, expert opinions, statistics, examples, counterarguments) does the author use?

Could parts be left out? If so, where?

Could the writer have used more purposeful and precise language? If so, what words do you suggest?

Did you find any parts to be confusing? If so, what parts?

Does the conclusion bring closure to the essay? Does the writer give you a lasting impression that reflects the importance of the argument or persuade you to take some course of action?

Does the essay include a variety of sentence types?

What do you like best about this persuasive writing piece? Why?

What could the writer do to most improve this piece?

Are there spelling and grammatical errors?