What’s in a Textbook?

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One of the most useful tools an instructor possesses is the textbook. While this chapter focuses on handbooks, the gamut of tools at an instructor’s disposal—handbooks, focused texts and readers—can augment the classroom experience for both students and instructors. Consequently, one aspect that all handbooks must address is the need for revision. The scope of this study included current texts associated with the major publishers who often frequent local conferences and professional development activities (listed in the Appendix to this chapter). Although these texts represent the majority of relevant offerings on this topic by these publishers, by next year these will be supplemented, replaced, revised or eliminated by others, so that this output becomes reduced to a snapshot capturing a moment-in-time view of collegiate handbooks.

All of the handbooks focus on the concept of the writing process as a method to present the concept of revision, as will those of the foreseeable future. Still, most textbooks, even handbooks, relegate a disproportionately few pages to revision for the value it offers to first year college composition students. Usually embedded at the end of a discussion of the writing process, these fragments generally focus on three major phases of revision: revising, editing and proofreading. When students move into the paragraphs looking closely at sentences, diction and mechanics, they edit. Proofreading “means reading to correct any typographical errors or other slips such as inconsistencies in spelling and punctuation” (Lunsford 105). Students often confuse the latter two activities with revision, believing correcting surface errors creates a perfect essay. Although these phases remain crucial for the success of the final product, they occur as mere steps in a process, the final steps.
However, the main function of revision should not be limited to a sequential process, but rather an evolution of an essay through revisioning a work, allowing the students to see their initial effort differently. Revision touches all aspects of writing—a pre-writing outline or thesis tends to be revised repeatedly. Yet these activities do not replace the need for students to dedicate a portion of time to this final writing process phase. Most first year college composition students fail to realize that the expectation for quality writing, achieved through revision, will extend beyond the composition course to other academic and professional pursuits, including resumes, cover letters, proposals, reports, memos and e-mails.

All major publishers offer unique approaches within the handbook section(s) devoted to revision, aiding students in the quest for an effective paper and providing instructors ideas to move their students closer to achieving this goal. Once students view their work objectively, the possibility for meaningful revision exists. The techniques included in this chapter offer examples from a variety of publishers in an attempt to acknowledge that whatever text instructors choose will supply a reasonable approach to revision. An attempt has been made to demonstrate some of the uniqueness found in selected textbooks after establishing common points found in most of the reviewed works.

**Handbooks**

The 2004 *Hodges' Harbrace Handbook (HHH)* typifies the handbook approaches to the process of revision. After introducing the three major phases of revision, the text makes an effort to establish the importance of revision by suggesting that throughout all portions of the writing process, the writer continually revises in a recursive fashion, yet a period of the process must be focused on specific revision activities. The section on the revision process focuses on the need for the writer to “recall your purpose, restate your thesis, and reconsider your audience” (Glenn, Miller and Webb 446). Here the technical insert also suggests many writers save each draft to map the work’s progress (446). The section heading “Anything and everything on the page can be revised” captures another valuable, self-explanatory suggestion. This section reinforces the other common areas that effective writers achieve: well developed, unified, coherent, cohesive and complete ideas. The remainder of the chapter guides the students through typi-
cal problem areas—tone, introductions and conclusions—before continuing with the other phases of the revision process.

At this point, *HHH* introduces the concept of peer editing with an emphasis on ensuring standards are established for both writers and reviewers. This process, if not well handled, can create extreme frustration for students and discourage them from the revision process altogether. Students fail to perceive how someone struggling in the same situation they are experiencing can help them. Students must be guided to understand their weaknesses and strengths. Clarifying those areas to others where assistance is sought or where the most assistance may be provided allows students success in the peer review process. This section continues to indicate that a draft must be ready for review, but often students submit work that hasn’t been edited, or even proofread. These surface errors then become the focus of the critique, which provides little assistance to the writer and perpetuates the notion that editing is revision.

These peer review sessions must be structured so both parties understand the expectations. *HHH* offers a sample checklist for this activity where the embedded parenthetical references refer to the earlier sections in the chapter where the topics of the question were discussed:

- What is your purpose in the essay (32a(1))? Does this essay fulfill the assignment?
- Does the essay address a specific audience (32a(2))? Is that audience appropriate for the assignment?
- What is the tone of the essay (33a(3))? How does the tone align with the overall purpose, the intended audience, and the context for the writing (32a)?
- Is your topic sufficiently focused (32b)? What is the thesis statement (32c)?
- What assertions do you make to support the thesis statement? How do you support these assertions? What specific evidence do you provide?
- Are paragraphs arranged into effective sentences (32d)? What order do you use? Is each paragraph thoroughly developed (31c)?
• Is the introduction effective (33b(1))? How do you engage the reader’s attention?

• Is the conclusion appropriate for the essay’s purpose (33b(2))? Does it draw the essay together or does it seem disconnected and abrupt? (457–58)

Ultimately, this method of inquiry helps the student writers and peer editors develop a more holistic approach than mere editing. With minor modifications like the elimination of the second person references, these questions can be an effective guide for the reviewer. The final question regarding the use of abruptness in context of the conclusion prompts further inquiry into the flow of the entire piece through well-crafted transitions. This checklist supplies students with a basis that can evolve into their individual heuristic.

Following this checklist, *HHH* suggests the writer submit a cover letter, with the draft for review, indicating the topic and purpose, strengths and areas of concerns. This enables those involved in the peer review process to establish a bit of dialog by allowing the writer to explain what is desired and to provide more specific, directed guidance for the reviewer’s response. The final peer review sections warn about the varying quality of the feedback and explain the value of providing feedback, since peer collaboration helps both the writer and reviewer. The handbook then includes an edited, student essay with revisions and peer feedback included. As an example of this and the editing process, focusing on sentence level and word choice corrections, the handbook offers students a view of the various stages this essay traversed to evolve into a finished piece included at the end of the chapter. Additional editing and proofreading checklists refer to the other pertinent sections in the handbook.

These, then, seem to be the common revision points included in most handbooks: 1) showing revision as an integral part of the writing process; 2) stressing the need for a clear set up of purpose, audience and voice; 3) venturing beyond surface errors during peer editing sessions; 4) using checklists to guide the reader through various revision processes, important concepts and the related sections for review in the text; and 5) illustrating basic concepts through example student drafts. While these are all prevalent in the majority of handbooks, each offers non-mainstream variations to provide options for writers to master their skill.
While most texts follow similar patterns, some attempt various methods to allow students to take a fresh view of their work. Most indicate that students should distance themselves from their writing for a specified time span, which is rarely possible when the composing effort begins on the due date’s eve. More practical approaches to this problem include a method of inquiry from the essence of critical thinking.

In the 2003 edition, *The St. Martin’s Handbook (SMH)*, for example, suggests students reread to ensure conveyance of their meaning, which may be difficult if students feel they have conveyed the point, just as the best of proofreaders subconsciously insert missing words. Another suggestion this textbook offers encourages the reconsideration of the students’ rhetorical stance primarily focusing on how an audience perceives them—a good focus for peer editing sessions discussed at this point in conjunction with audience, purpose, thesis, support and organization. In addition to reviewing the introduction and conclusion, *SMH* addresses reconsideration of the work’s title.

The text directs students to examine paragraphs closely to ensure compliance with the guidelines for clear relation to the paragraph’s topic; sentences for varying length, structure and openings; and wording, tone and format. Even though some consider the inspection within a paragraph to belong to the editing phase in the process, all of these operations precede the ideas about editing and proofreading confined to the next two pages. Yet within these pages can be found good editing suggestions for using the find function within most edit menus of word processing software to locate keywords that highlight errors, such as searching for “however” or “for example” to ensure proper comma usage. This technique may also be helpful in locating redundancies, excessive unintentional passive constructions and use of non-active verbs. Students are encouraged to keep track of the mistakes they find to add to their individual heuristic. Within the editing section emerges a significant insight from *SMH* directing students to create an editing list by reviewing comments from previously graded papers, which adds value to instructors’ comments. Some editing list examples are provided in a table format. Using some type of an error log, where students discover, identify and correct their previous work in a list, ultimately they begin to the create an individual editing inventory, which in turn contributes to their heuristic repertory. This strategy may help eliminate surface errors and reinforce grammar rules that
apply to proofreading, but must not stop there. The section concludes with a student’s final draft that has gone through several revisions in earlier portions of the textbook with an activity challenging students to find modifications from the editing and proofreading phases.

A distinctive feature of the HHH revision chapter is that one of the technical hints addressed is the use of grammar checking software. Students are cautioned to evaluate the suggestions made by various software programs, much as they are warned to questions peer feedback (449). Grammar checking software, however, cannot revise the students’ essays. With the assistance of basic artificial intelligence techniques, the software may provide some grammatical assistance and corrective suggestions, which focus on the elimination of passive constructions rather than on the myriad of potential sentence level errors that only a human mind can discover. Unfortunately, too often students feel that because they used a grammar and/or spell checker, they have revised, or fixed, their essays only to provide homonym errors and misspellings like Martian Luther King.

Many handbooks include diagnostic tests, such as Ann Raimes’s 2003 version of Keys for Writers, as part of their ancillary instructor materials. This type of test, which also appears in most of John Langan’s texts like Sentence Skills with Readings of 2001, breaks major grammar issues into specific sets of exercises. When students review the exercises answered incorrectly, those grammar rules should be given extra attention. Reviewing the test provides the instructor with a method of doing a relatively quick grammar review, so it does not have to become the focus of the freshman composition course. If common problems persist in students’ writing, some further grammar discussion may prove necessary by referring to the appropriate area of the handbook, so the students realize the value of this as a reference tool. Basic grammar skills that some students find difficult to grasp can be better conveyed using more simplified explanations, which can be found in texts like Basic Grammar and Usage by Penelope Choy and Dorothy Goldbart Clark; New Handbook for Basic Writing Skills by Cora L. Robey, Cheryl K. Jackson, Carolyn M. Melchor and Helen M. Maloney; and The Least You Should Know about English Writing Skills by Paige Wilson and Teresa Ferster Glazer.

Keys for Writers provides other useful ancillary materials for both the instructor and the students available through a companion website (college.hmco.com/keys.html), as offered by many handbooks. In ad-
dition to the diagnostic and other sample tests, this site provides over sixty transparency masters, several focusing on revision, and PowerPoint slides for classroom presentation of pertinent topics. Both the instructor and student portions of the website allow access to Digital Keys 3.1 Online, a complete online handbook. The student accessible portion of the site also contains several PDF format documents, including another version of a peer-editing sheet, to aid with writing activities. The site encourages student involvement with interactive Web activities. Flashcards are provided to offer “a quick review of important terms and concepts” and some specific vocabulary “flashcards derived from The American Heritage College Dictionary” list “100 words you should know.” The increase in students’ vocabularies from these tools will prove invaluable when searching for the proper wording during the revision process.

In another valuable section of the website, Raimes introduces the handbook through a guided tour of the text. Students must purchase required books for a course. They rely on the instructor to tell them what to do with these tomes, but in the case of handbooks, familiarizing them with the textbook helps them understand its value as a reference tool. Another good example of combining an online source with the handbook can be found in Lynn Troyka’s Quick Access from 2001. In both of these cases, as well as several others, the entire text being available in a CD or online version provides students a familiar method to search for the information they need. The tools and techniques from these various sources can be extremely effective in editing and proofreading, important phases in the process, but students must be reminded of the revision’s larger concerns beyond syntactical efforts.

The Blair Handbook provides didactic inquiry for the students to develop their writing heuristic. After the common process approach to revision, The Blair Handbook prompts students to ask a series of questions that focus on rhetorical strategies:

- Why am I writing this paper? (Review the assignment.)
- Do all parts of the paper advance this purpose? (Outline by paragraph and make sure they do.)
- What is my rhetorical strategy: to narrate, explain, interpret, argue, reflect or something else? (Review Chapter 6 [“Assuming Stance”] to fine-tune strategy.)
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• Have I stated the paper’s theme or thesis clearly? (If not, do so, or have a good reason for not doing so.) . . .

• What does my audience know about this subject? (Avoid repeating elementary information.)

• What does my audience need to know to understand the point of my paper? (Provide full context and background for information your audience is not likely to know.)

• What questions or objections do I anticipate my audience raising? (Try to answer them before they are asked.)

• Which passages sound like me speaking and which don’t? (Enjoy those that do; fix those that don’t.). (Fulwiler and Hayakawa 276–77)

The questions are followed by parenthetical suggested actions for students to take. Caution should be used, as in the case of the last of these questions, since often one’s voice changes when adapting to a formal writing voice rather than a speaking voice. Such contradictions may only serve to confuse writers, rather than instilling the required skill to reflect on their writing. This confusion can be mitigated somewhat if students review the Listen for your voice heading in the next section. This section suggests using revision strategies under the following headings from the section. After each heading from the text here is a brief summary of what each section contains:

• Establish distance: contains similar suggestions about setting the work aside for a while, but includes distancing by reading aloud.

• Reconsider everything: where the writer is reminded to review even those areas not commented on by others.

• Belief and doubt: introduces a system of check marks and question marks with two distinct personas, a supportive friend and one “suspicious and skeptical.”

• Test your theme and thesis: discusses adapting to a changing thesis.

• Evaluate your evidence: provides specific questions for the evaluation and references to the related chapters.
• Make a paragraph outline: utilizes a pre-writing tool to map the essay.

• Rewrite introductions and conclusions: offers ideas similar to adapting the thesis and insuring these paragraphs function after the essay’s modifications.

• Listen for your voice: emphasizes retaining the writer’s personality, while in formal papers sounding less conversational and more like a presentation.

• Let go: prompting students not to become enraptured with their words and phrases, thereby remaining open to change.

• Start over: provides some good suggestions for re-visioning a piece like abandoning the first draft, even suggesting an inadvertent loss, such as a lost computer file, may prompt a greater discovery, hence a stronger essay. (Fulwiler and Hayakawa 277–79)

Complimenting these inquires, the text introduces focused revising, which uses the ideas of limiting, adding, switching and transforming. Limiting entails suggestions that students focus their work to short time spans and create a narrowly scoped topic. Although adding appears to conflict with the limiting section, the recommended additions include adding expert voices and details. Students strengthen and clarify with authority and support the focused thesis of the essay. After some typical recommendations are presented for revision, the ideas of switching and transforming are introduced, both of which enable students to view the work from alternate perspectives. With switching, the emphasis moves to altering point of view, tense and sides. Switching sides on an issue truly probes pro versus con arguments. With transforming the initial essay draft is shifted to a different genre—a journal entry, a letter, a documentary, a book with chapters, a magazine article, talk show debate, or any other medium of expression.

Understanding the value of addressing students’ increased familiarity with technology, Lester Faigley designs *The Brief Penguin Handbook* in a format that parallels Internet Web pages. Faigley’s inclusion of the writing process appears within his first section titled “Composing in the Digital Era,” where he incorporates an abundance of visual images, which not only enhance students’ involvement and engagement with the handbook’s ideas, but also anticipate the use of visual
images within students’ writing projects. Throughout this handbook Faigley applies his design technique, creating a unique approach that appeals to students who are already comfortable with Web design formats. In fact, significant additions in *The Brief Penguin Handbook* provide instruction for the creation and use of graphics in text, culminating in their value in oral presentations.

Faigley also demonstrates in “Writing for the Web” how the writing process exists not as a chronological linear progression, but one in which the activities of planning, composing and revising meld into an evolution of a Web page. This insight guides instructors to ensure adjustments to instruction corresponding to the students’ world, while providing the basics of the writing process. It may no longer be as effective for the instructor to enforce a process which students cannot imagine since it fails to apply to their electronic environment. By showing students how various steps interrelate to achieve the desired purpose, such as utilizing an outline in the revision process, the instructor enters the students’ realm.

**Revision Focused Textbooks**

Several texts focus on the revision process providing instructors and students with insights into how to manage the process. All of the publishers listed in the appendix offer a variety of texts that help instructors and students understand more about how to revise and the importance of revision to achieve a finished piece. Examples included here expand on a text used in another chapter, a book focusing on the student in its approach and an anthology that combines ideas from multiple perspectives.

As Carol Trupiano elucidates in the “Best Practices” chapter, Donald M. Murray’s 2004 edition of *The Craft of Revision* approaches the entire writing process, the initial phases well covered by the first two chapters, as a continual effort to revise until reaching his final chapter “The Craft of Letting Go.” Following “Reading for Revising,” which clarifies the concept and purpose of peer review, Murray’s chapters focus on specific areas to revise: with focus, with genre, with structure, with documentation. Students also must concentrate on essay development, including sensitivity to how it sounds and maintaining clarity for the audience. While several of these areas appear obvious, Murray’s presentation makes the ideas very accessible to the students.
As an example of demonstrating value in the world after college, Murray includes a section in his chapter “Rewrite with Focus” concentrating on the writer’s voice within a business context entitled “How do I Make the Boss’s Idea My Own?” (57–58). Murray’s chapter “Rewrite with Genre” directs students to establish the correct format for their writing based on their purpose and audience, not restricting the options to standard rhetorical modes, but including forms the students will encounter like grant proposals and memos (85). The chapter “Rewrite by Ear” further emphasizes the importance of voice to help students distinguish and use different voices. To supplement Murray’s efforts to make these concepts clear in his own terminology, he includes interviews and case studies of professional and student writers at the end of most chapters to emphasize his points.

Richard A. Lanham’s approach in Revising Prose captures his readers’ attention by acknowledging that evaluation criteria are rarely explained or emphasized in previous instruction. He comprehends the problems that plague first year college writers. Initially Lanham provides practical exercises to first understand revision, then the differing rhetorical situations, and finally the reason revision is important to the emerging writer, bringing relevance to what many instructors preach with an application students can grasp.

Lanham’s first chapter focuses on one of the most important ideas enhancing the active nature of writing. Techniques like eliminating excessive prepositional phrases and the conjugations of to be, or in essence, not to be, combine structure with style, a major concern of revision. He ensures in the next few chapters that students have a clear understanding of revision. Lanham clarifies the different writing situations they’ll experience with the chapters “The Official Style” and “The School Style.” Perhaps the most important, his final chapter “Why Bother?” guides students through the significance this skill has for their lives. With such an approachable format that engages his audience, Lanham offers not only a guide, but also a model that can only be surpassed by several minds collaborating.

Wendy Bishop edited the anthology Acts of Revision offering several unique perspectives on revision techniques too, from Brock Dethier’s “Revising Attitudes,” involving how writers often approach revision with resistance revision, to Jay Szczepanski’s “Why Not Hypertext? Converting the Old, Interpreting the New, Revising the Rest,” regarding composing and revising multimedia. The articles are presented, of
course, not in a linear progression, since revision is far from a linear process. The premise Bishop uses to unify the work presents authors with a strong understanding of revision’s value. Bishop envisions an audience that has accepted this process as writers and in her compilation provides a variety of approaches to re-visioning their work. In her introduction, she encourages writers to review these ideas, accept those with others they encounter that work well for their writing style and reject those that cannot be applied.

Readers

Bishop also offers a unique reader, *On Writing: a process reader*. While some readers still attempt to pigeonhole essays into the nine rhetorical modes (narration, description, definition, exemplification, division/classification, comparison/contrast, process analysis, causal analysis, and argumentation), Bishop has associated various steps that writers encounter with readings that exemplify the issues she presents, such as “Writers and Ways of Writing” and “Language Matters.” Stephen Reid in *Purpose and Process: A Reader for Writers* takes a similar approach including a thematic table of contents. This idea of a thematic approach to readers offers instructors the ability to deal with issues students encounter. Lisa Ede’s *Work in Progress*, which has evolved considerably from preceding editions in the 2004 version, offers another excellent example of combining a reader, primarily of student examples, and the ideas needed to understand academic requirements.

While revision tends to be presented as a phase in a consecutive process, revision remains a recursive process that evolves over not only several drafts of an essay, but from all the writing students produce. Instructors need to aid students in the creation of an individual heuristic to perform their own holistic evaluation of what is written. While textbooks, especially handbooks, aid in this effort, the stock questions provided may not be applicable to all students. Instructors need to balance the general suggestions that all students need with the individualized areas of improvement that students require. With the range of textbooks available, instructors may need to break away from the required text to find what works for individual students. Since instructors encourage distinct voices rather than a formulaic approach, students need heuristics based on what works for them.
The approach of revision as a mere phase in a process limits the potential of revision and reduces it to editing and proofreading. Students need more. Instructors provide this by selecting effective textbooks and using the information available in these resources to adapt to the specific needs of their students. Focused texts can help achieve and hone first year college writers’ skills, while good texts with readings can aid in establishing connections to pertinent issues or presenting valuable knowledge and tools. Students must be able to take a multifaceted approach to their writing by moving from a checklist to a broader view of re-vision. Limitations created by confining revision to one phase of a process could cause students to miss the concept that revision occurs from the initial idea to the final product and must be performed regardless of the rhetorical situation, whether in an academic or career situation. All of the publishers listed in the appendix provide excellent options allowing instructors to exercise academic freedom to adapt the course focus to what works well with the student population; however, readers rarely function well without a handbook as at least a reference tool, which instructors need to incorporate in the students’ revision activities.

APPENDIX: A LISTING OF BOOKS FROM MAJOR COMPOSITION PUBLISHERS


Sebranek, Verne Meyer and Dave Kemper; *Essential English Handbook* by James Kirkland and Collett B. Dilworth.

