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Spotlight On....Editing and Revising: Developing Effective Writing

Before beginning a first draft, students should experience high quality instruction designed to provide multiple opportunities to engage with content, gather information, clarify ideas and prepare to write. When a draft is finally created, many students consider it done, a fait accompli.

Encouraging students to develop a continuing relationship with the piece of writing to strengthen it through revision and editing can be challenging. Maine's English Language Arts (ELA)/Literacy standards place heavy emphasis on helping students learn how to convey ideas and enhance understanding through writing for a variety of purposes and audiences. Central to communicating effectively is the ability to strengthen writing by revising and editing. A number of the ELA/Literacy standards are directly connected to the ability to revise and edit, including those in the Production and Distribution of Writing cluster, the Craft and Structure of Reading cluster, the Comprehension and Collaboration of Speaking and Listening cluster and in the Language strand. Learning to revise and edit well not only leads to more effective writing, but fosters the ability to critically read (and listen) to determine if the writing's (or speaker's) message matches its intended goal(s).

What is the difference between editing and revising? We often use the two terms interchangeably but there are clear distinctions between revising ideas and editing conventions. The [Student Learning Center at UC Berkeley](#) offers the following:

Editing

- is on a sentence level, addressing problems with spelling, grammar, punctuation, or word choice.
- is one-sided. The editor writes comments and corrections on the paper and returns the paper to the writer.
- is hierarchical. An editor looks for "mistakes" and "fixes" them.
- focuses on the paper as a product.

If it sounds like writing, I rewrite it.

~Elmore Leonard



I'm all for the scissors. I believe more in the scissors than I do in the pencil.

~Truman Capote

Revising

- deals with the paper as a whole, considering strengths and weaknesses, arguments, focus and organization, support and voice, as well as mechanical issues.
- is dialogue-based. The purpose of revision is to ask questions, expanding ideas and challenging arguments which require discussion between the writer and the reader.
- is non-hierarchical. Offering questions and making observations allow the writer and reader to hold separate and valid opinions. The purpose of discussion is to expand and clarify ideas rather than "correct" them.
- focuses on the writer in the process of writing and increasing the writer's understanding of the paper's strengths and weaknesses.
- clarifies and focuses the writer's arguments by defining terms, making concessions and counter-arguments, and using evidence. This may involve moving or removing entire paragraphs, extending or narrowing ideas, rewriting vague or confusing text, and adding to existing paragraphs.

To prepare students for what lies ahead, whether it is postsecondary composition or job embedded writing, students need instruction in both editing and revising. While these two components of writing instruction may have different degrees of emphasis at different times during a student's instructional journey, both must be present in the student's experience.

Online Resources

The following online resources provide instructional tools for editing and revising writing.

[Reading Rockets](#)

The Reading Rockets site provides an excellent set of resources for revising and editing student writing. Using "revising" or "editing" as the search terms will yield a number of resources. Additionally, the [Looking at Writing](#) collection and the [Growing Writers](#) collection contain helpful tools for building understanding of writing development and instruction across the PK-3 span.

[Read-Write-Think](#)

The National Council of Teachers of English's Read-Write-Think site is packed with lessons and resources to support instruction of revision/editing. Use "revision" or "editing" as search terms and then use the sorting features to select grade levels.



Upcoming Professional Development from the Maine DOE

To explore potential training sessions that may be of interest, be sure to check our extensive list of professional development offerings at

www.maine.gov/doe/calendar/



[Maine Educational Assessment \(MEA\) for ELA/Literacy](#)

Assessment tasks on the MEA for ELA/Literacy include items that assess students' ability to revise and edit. Targets 1, 3, 6 and 8 for Claim 2 (Writing) include revision tasks while Target 9 tasks focus on editing. To examine samples of these tasks, check out the [sample items](#), [training and practice tests](#) and/or the [item specification documents](#) for ELA Claim 2.

Video Clips

Sometimes the best way to learn about revising and editing instruction is to see it in action. Check out the following clips:

[Video of two elementary students explaining and modeling the revision process.](#)

[Video of 5th grade writing conference with focus on revision points.](#)

[Video of seventh grade students participating in a peer edit process.](#)

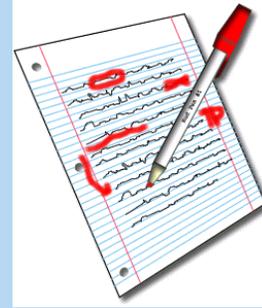
Professional Texts

The following professional texts contain instructional suggestions for teaching revising and editing.

[Creating Six-Trait Revisers and Editors: Revision and Editing Lessons](#)

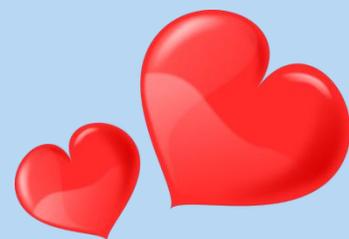
Vicki Spandel 2008

Spandel presents teachers in grades 2-8 with effective tools for strengthening revision and editing skills. Each research-based volume includes interactive lessons based on samples of problematic writing that students revise or edit in teams, with a follow-up coaching discussion led by the teacher. Clear illustrations and step-by-step instructions help teachers know what writing skill to focus on—how to introduce it, present it, and reinforce it in students' own writing (Amazon).



Good stories are not written.
They are rewritten.

~Phyllis Whitney



Patterns for College Writing: A Rhetorical Reader and Guide

Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell, 2014

A text book that contains, in one convenient tome, sample essays and strategies for analysis which lead to effective and meaningful revision as well as manageable approaches to editing. The text also features an [accompanying website](#) with more resources.

Literature for Children and Adolescents

Here are a couple of excellent mentor texts (books that can be used as models of writing for instructional purposes) for promoting revising and editing.

Dear Mrs. Larue, Letters from Obedience School

Mark Teague, 2003

In this engaging text, the cunning dog, Ike Larue, is enrolled in dog obedience school. In his free time, he writes mournful letters to his owner trying to convince her to let him return home. The humor of the story comes by studying the illustrations which tell a much different tale about the spa-like qualities of the school. Students can try their hand at revising Ike's letters to convey messages that match the illustrations.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian

Sherman Alexie, 2007

Junior, an aspiring cartoonist, lives on a Spokane Indian reservation and is determined to take his future into his own hands. Junior narrates the tale first hand but occasionally feels that the story must be told in pictures. As a mentor text, Alexie provides plenty of fodder for analyzing varying narrative techniques.

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