Title Breaking out of the Editing Prison: Learning to Revise for Content First

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Goal and Rationale: Students who are new to the writing process often approach revision from a sentence-level perspective. They can edit and proofread but often have trouble figuring out how to begin substantive content revision. By providing an opportunity to practice and discuss substantive revision on an example paper, students will both gain insight into their own revision tendencies as well as learn the difference between revising and editing.

Review of Literature: I have included a reading for students entitled “Shitty First Drafts” by Anne Lamott. It’s a humorous account of dealing with the first draft and promotes a relaxed approach to drafting that can help students overcome fear of the blank page and encourage them to use revision to strengthen their writing.

Connection to Learning Outcomes: This activity fulfills the C&C learning outcomes for students to develop flexible strategies for revising as well as to engage in small group activities for exploring and expressing their experiences.

Here is my outline for teaching the writing process and where this assignment would fit:

- Introduce writing process: recursive writing strategies and the function of process [preceding homework: students read one article and their handbook or rhetoric section on the writing process]
- Invention: how to mine for engaging and functional topics; introduce first major assignment to practice invention [preceding homework: students read major assignment instructions and Supplement on the invention strategies] *See Invention Objects under the Bb Writing Process Folder for sample activities
- First Drafts: how to get ideas out on paper [preceding homework: students read the PDF for Ann Lamott’s essay, “Shitty First Drafts,” under the Bb Writing Process folder]
- Revision: use this learning object [preceding homework: students write “shitty first draft” for major assignment]

The Lesson Plan Itself:

Preceding Work: 15 minutes

- Discuss purpose and types of revision and editing
- Overview hierarchy of revision and editing
1. Revision:
   a. content focus
   b. development
   c. organization

2. Editing: sentence-level clarity and precision

3. Proofreading: final error checking

- Give examples of each type of revision or editing

1. Revision:
   a. content focus: fits the assignment, clear guiding idea/thesis/claim, relevant points
   b. development: clear explanations, examples, details, or support for the main ideas
   c. organization: logical transitions, paragraph order, unified paragraphs

2. Editing: sentence-level clarity and precision—avoids vague pronouns, uses complete sentences, etc.

3. Proofreading: final error checking—missing words, typos, etc.

Activity: 30 minutes

1. Hand out one-page sample draft that would fit the major assignment

2. Have students read the draft to themselves, annotating or making marginal comments about weaknesses and strengths

3. Project copy of the draft for class to see; have several students read one of their marginal comments (one or two comments per paragraph) and type/write them in the appropriate place on the projected draft.

4. As a class, assign a number to each comment, based on what it addresses (corresponding to the numbered outline above in the hierarchy; i.e., 1a for comments about thesis or appropriateness for assignment, 2 for comments about sentence-level issues, etc.). Then, have students rank the rest of their own comments on their copy of the draft and then add up how many they have of each.

5. Discuss which kinds of comments seem the most useful at this point in the drafting phase (most will say 1a or 1b, focus and development), how easy it is to lose sight of that for the sentence-level issues. This usually prompts one or two student epiphanies in the discussion.
6. Assign students to revise their first draft using this method as homework OR

**Extended Activity for longer classes: 30 minutes**

7. Have students read their own draft (which they should have printed and brought to class) and write marginal comments about weaknesses. They should then number each comment.

8. On a separate sheet of paper, have them rank their comments based on the hierarchy. Then, exchange drafts with a partner, who will then rank the comments themselves.

9. **Pair/Share:** students would discuss their rankings and whether or not they agree or disagree

10. **Discuss:** students could ask questions about discrepancies or clarify the different types of comments; final conversation about what they learned, how they can apply this in the future, effectiveness of activity, etc.

11. Assign students to revise their first draft

**Synthesis [optional]:** This activity prepares students not only for substantive revision but also introduces them to peer review/critique. After this assignment, my outline to complete the section on the writing process is as follows:

- Peer critique: best practices for peer commenting [preceding homework: students read one article and their handbook or rhetoric section on peer critique]

- First draft due/peer critique [preceding homework: complete revisions of the first draft]