



CHAPTER 7

The Craft of Revision

I have never thought of myself as a good writer. Anyone who wants reassurance of that should read one of my first drafts. But I'm one of the world's great rewriters.

—JAMES MICHENER

Beginning writers often assume that talent and luck determine writing success, but experienced writers know to credit one more key factor: revision—and its power to transform early drafts into worthwhile work. Pulitzer prize-winning author James Michener, who has written a dozen best-sellers, expects that good writing *is* rewriting, a given, a fact of the daily writing life. You do it until you've solved most problems, even if you are Ernest Hemingway.

HEMINGWAY: I rewrote the ending to *Farewell to Arms*, the last page of it, 39 times before I was satisfied.

INTERVIEWER: Was there some technical problem there? What was it that had you stumped?

HEMINGWAY: Getting the words right.

It's that simple and that hard: to get the words right. Even when we don't need thirty-nine drafts, we should expect revision to be an integral part of our writing process, involving as much, or more, energy than the first draft did. It's easy to read published authors and assume their words appeared effortlessly on the page; but some renowned veterans like John Kenneth Galbraith admit the truth: "There are days when the result is so bad that no fewer than five revisions are required. In contrast, when I'm greatly inspired, only four revisions are needed."

In Chapter 4, “Taking Shape,” we talked about the kind of intuitive revision that happens as the first rush of language moves us toward a solid draft. In this chapter we focus on what happens *after* writers have a draft with a promising topic, voice, and shape. This kind of revision works best when writers are able to let the draft sit for a while—a day, a week, a month, sometimes years. E. B. White’s essay “Once More to the Lake” (pp. 293–298) began when he was fourteen as a response to that standard teacher assignment: “How I Spent My Summer Vacation.” Twenty-two years later his second draft was written as a letter to his brother, and five years after that the final version appeared in *Harper’s Magazine*. It’s been an anthology favorite ever since.

Time provides the much-needed distancing to reenter texts with a fresh eye and ear. So does feedback from readers who point out what may be in our heads but not yet on the page. When we use both, the craft of revision is easier. It is still an intuitive act, sparked by reentering the text after a writing break; but it’s also sparked by a more conscious and critical assessment of a draft’s language and meaning.

The Situation and the Story

Vivian Gornick, in a savvy little book on creative nonfiction called *The Situation and the Story*, makes the distinction between “the situation”—the events we depict—and “the story” that makes that situation worth writing about. The first, “the situation,” is easy to write down; it’s the plot line, the facts of what happened, the “who, what, when, where, and how.” The second, “the story,” is more elusive and much more important for success. Gornick explains the difference this way:

The situation is the context or circumstance, sometimes the plot; the story is the *emotional experience* that preoccupies the writer; the insight, the wisdom, the thing one has come to say.

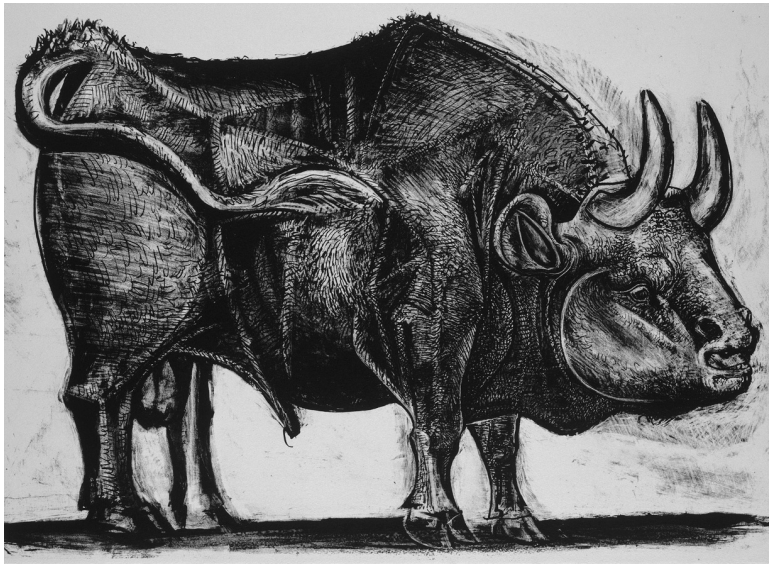
One way to look at revision is as the act of discovering *why* “the situation” matters and then conveying that *why* in a way that will make readers care. This means finding “the story” that drives the telling and sharpening its focus so that whether or not readers know the writer, they are engaged. “The situation” alone won’t do that because most of us are ordinary people reacting to real life experiences. We are neither famous nor renowned experts in our

fields, so our “situations” are rarely of inherent interest. It’s “the story”—*our* take on “the situation,” *our* struggle to understand it—that makes our words, if we find the right ones, of interest. As Gornick puts it, “What happened to the writer is not what matters; what matters is the larger sense that the writer is able to make of what happened.”

To find where the story lies, Gornick says that “the power of imagination is needed.” By “imagination,” she is not referring to the imaginary or to make-believe. Rather, she means a power to go beyond the obvious and make leaps through language into new understandings and new expressions of what is true. That power resides, as we’ve said often in this book, in a willingness to explore, to take risks, to experiment, to be receptive to new insights. It also resides in the craft of revision, which involves, literally, re-seeing what the story means for ourselves and then for others.

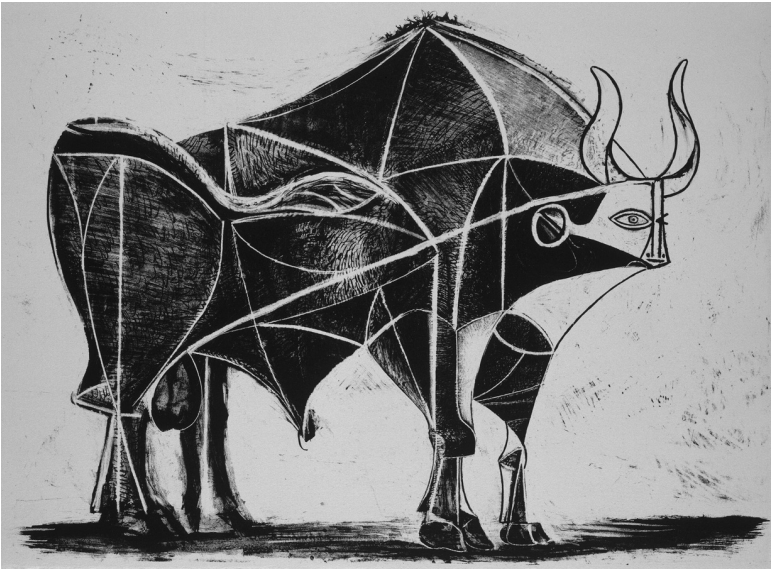
Picasso's Bulls

To understand how imagination and the craft of revision go hand-in-hand, look at four of Pablo Picasso's drawings of a bull. What changes occur from his early rendering of the bull to his last one? How do they affect you as viewer?



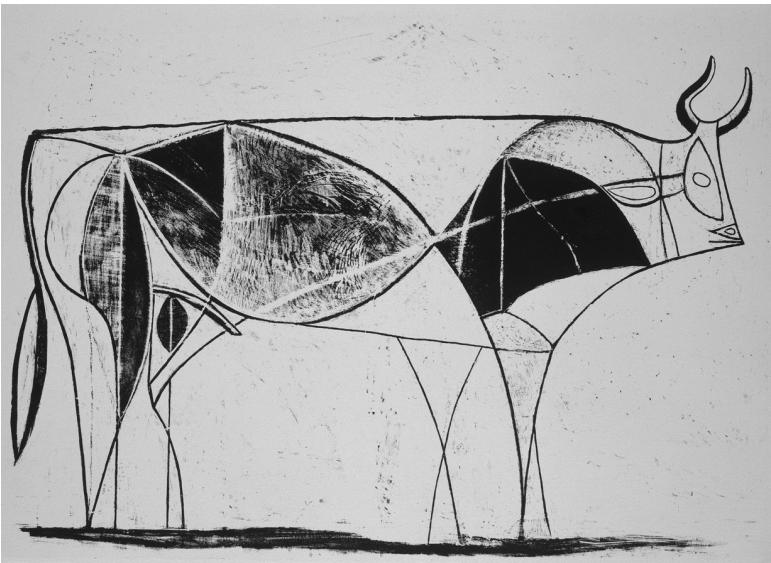
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The Bull (December 18, 1945)



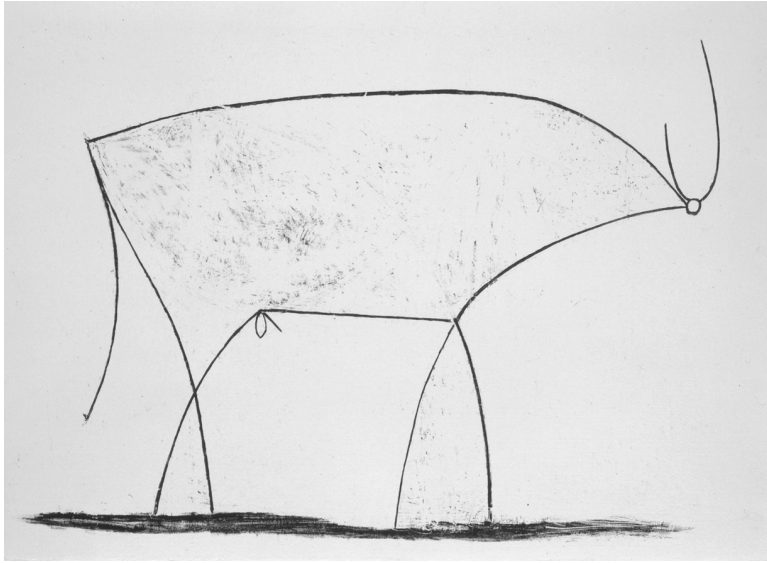
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The Bull (December 24, 1945)



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The Bull (January 2, 1946)



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The Bull (January 17, 1946)

In this series, we can see how Picasso's imagination worked to find "the story" of the bull. Others, through revision, might tell a different "story." But this series belongs to Picasso; it depicts his vision of what constitutes "true."

Knowing Your Writing and Rewriting Style

Some writers think a lot before they start, revising before they've written one word. They try out lines and paragraphs in their heads, they talk to friends, they read magazines and books, they may even lift weights or clean closets, waiting for good ideas and a structure to announce themselves before they begin. Others write first, knowing they will discover what is good later on. Like James Michener, they count on revision to create something worthwhile out of the messiness of an early draft.

Those who write first rarely have writer's block because they set the initial bar of expectations low: just write. Those who raise the bar at the outset may have less uncertainty in revision, but more *angst* getting started. Both approaches can produce fine

finished work if writers know their styles and how to raise or lower the bar as needed.

This morning I took the hyphen out of Hell-bound and this afternoon I put it back.

—EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

Once the first words appear, styles again differ. Some writers put down everything that comes to mind: the more language that flows out, the better. For them, revision will mean deciding what's best of what's there. Others hold back, looking for structure and shape. Revision, for them, will mean filling in what has only been sketched.

Sondra is the first kind of writer, what we call an *overwriter*. Her first drafts tend to be too full, ideas going off in many directions. Revision is where she cuts back and finds more focus, as you can see in what happened to the first paragraph of her memoir about teaching in Austria:

Early draft—opening paragraph:

When the phone rings one January morning in 1996, I have no inkling that the invitation I am about to accept will change my life. I have not even the faintest idea that agreeing to teach a group of Austrian teachers will be the beginning of an odyssey, one that beckons me toward an uncertain future and pulls me back into a painful past. On that Monday morning, I hear only a voice at the other end of the line proposing a fascinating piece of work. Nothing more. Initially I am elated and even flattered.

Final draft:

When the phone rings one January morning in 1996, I have no inkling that the invitation I am about to accept will be the beginning of an odyssey. I hear only a voice at the other end of the line proposing a compelling piece of work.

—*On Austrian Soil: Teaching Those I Was Taught to Hate*

Sondra says she made these changes because the phrase “will change my life” seemed too dramatic for an opening. So did “beckons me toward an uncertain future and pulls me back to an uncertain past.” It’s not that these sentiments weren’t true. They were. But Sondra felt, “The entire paragraph told too much too soon.

Why should anyone care if I'm elated or flattered? The reader doesn't even know me yet."

Mimi, on the other hand, is the second kind of writer, the *underwriter*. Her first drafts tend to be skimpy, but once down on paper, she fleshes them out, following the clues of first words. See how she turned a skeletal opening into a full one for her essay, "Sultan and the Red Honda":

Early draft of paragraph one:

When I was a child I rode black stallions to be brave. Each Saturday I took the Metropolitan Avenue bus over to Forest Park in my jodhpurs and boots to gallop through the trails, hoping the picnickers and old men and women on their daily walk would look up and say, "Look at her go!" I didn't like it as much when the horse reared once at the stable door and threw me on my face, scratching it and skinning my knees so badly that the blood when it dried caked around the rip in my jodhpurs. When I limped onto the bus to go home that day, those old men and ladies looked at me and probably said, "Poor Girl." I didn't like that at all.

Final draft:

Once upon a time I rented horses to be free. I'd climb on the Queens Metropolitan Avenue bus every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday and head for Stanley's Stables twenty minutes away. There Stanley or his brother Jake would give me Sultan or Rajah or Calamity Max to ride—not around the ring like the other kids, but into Forest Park, alone.

They knew I could sit a horse, they said. So I'd prance across Union Turnpike (even if the light were red) and gallop down trails, where I'd hope picnickers and old men and women on walks would look up and say, "Look at her go!" Up in that saddle, racing through the woods, I wasn't the shy, slouch-shouldered kid who everyone was always telling to stand up straight and smile. I was Roy Rogers, Elizabeth Taylor and the Lone Ranger all in one: a hero, a winner, a star.

Of course there were off days, like the time when Sultan, whom I loved best because he was wild and liked my carrots, bucked at the stable door and threw me face down into the gravelly dirt. As I limped onto the bus to go home that day, blood caked at the knees of my ripped jodhpurs, everyone stared and shook their heads as if to say, "Poor girl!"

I didn't like that at all.

The small changes in the first line—“rode” to “rented” and “brave” to “free”—were a creative trigger, says Mimi. “They led me to wonder what riding that rented stallion had to do with buying a red Honda thirty years later. I wrote the essay to find out.”

Overwriters and underwriters can both produce great writing—if the writer knows what to do next. The first revises by asking: What’s the story here? What, of all I’ve written, is essential? What can I get rid of? The second must ask: Where can I say more? Where do I need detail or dialogue to make the story come alive? Of course, these questions are asked by all revisers, but depending on style, successful writers know which ones they need to ask more often.

Revision for Better—or Worse

Whatever our writing style, there’s one revision tendency all writers must be wary of: rewriting the life out of a piece. Sometimes it happens when an overactive censor inhibits naturalness and the voice stiffens, becoming guarded, distant, and false. Sometimes it comes from the impulse to over-refine language, which makes the piece pretentious. Notebook entries, we find, are often livelier, with a more compelling voice than the works-in-progress they spawn. When this happens, writers are usually trying too hard to be poetic or profound—or trying to camouflage thoughts that seem embarrassing or controversial. So we overwrite, cluttering our initial text, or we cut back too much, as the poet Charles Bukowski captures in “It Doesn’t Always Work.”

“It Doesn’t Always Work”

I knew a writer once
who always tried to tighten his lines
like he’d write
an old man in a green felt hat walked down the
street.

change to:
old green man walked down street.

change to:
green man walked.

change to:
green walked.

Bukowski, Charles, “It Doesn’t Always Work,” originally appeared in *NEW YORK QUARTERLY*, no. 29, Spring 1986. Reprinted by permission of Linda Lee Bukowski and The Charles Bukowski Memorial Foundation.

finally this writer said,
shit, I can't fart,
and he blew his brains
out.
blew brains out.
blew brains.
blew.

To counter the more negative impulses of revision, we save all our drafts, dating them so we know which came first, second, and third. Then we compare old and new versions to assess which has more energy, something hard to do in the middle of rewriting. We also show old and new versions to friends or to a writing group. *Tip:* If you put revisions in bold, the next day you can go right to what is new and see how well the changes work. Once you like it, switch back to normal typeface. Another perk of using bold: the changes don't "count" yet, so you revise more freely.

Three Versions of One Opening

Writer Kay Boyle wrote the following paragraph three times until she found the words she wanted for a scene in "The Ballet of Central Park." We present them out of order. Identify which one she chose as her final version and check the end of this chapter for the answer. It may surprise you.

Draft A:

She wore a short blue dress over the black legs of her leotard, and her pink satin toe shoes were slung over her shoulder by their knotted strings. Her light hair was wrenched away from her scalp into a glossy ponytail, and her eyebrows were jet black and seemingly as perishable as the markings on a night-flying moth.

Draft B:

Over her leotard, she wore a short blue dress, and her ballet slippers, their pink cotton laces knotted together, were carried across her shoulder. Her hair was wrenched back into a glossy ponytail, and her brow was round and smooth as a doll's. But it was her eyebrows that startled one in disbelief. They were as delicate and jet black as the markings on a butterfly's wing, and seemingly as perishable. But they were an ancient and indestructible hieroglyphic,

saying; “Generations of wisdom, poetry, and perception have inscribed us on this brow.”

Draft C:

Over her black leotard, she wore a short dress of gentian blue, and her ballet slippers were slung across her shoulders by their knotted strings. Her hair, as light as cornsilk, was wrenched back in contrast, and seemingly as perishable as the markings on the wing of a butterfly. But this was deceptive, for they were not to be effaced. They were actually an ancient hieroglyphic which, deciphered, read: “Generations of wisdom, of perception, of finesse and tact have inscribed us on this forehead.” Her eyebrows were a grave and enduring statement made to the world.

The Rewriter’s Concerns

We may wish for a formula for revision, but there can never be one. Revision will always depend on what is on the page and what we are striving for, unnamed until we see it before us.

Some problems, of course, are recurrent: underwriters need to add material; overwriters need to cut. Other problems may be subject-dependent. An emotionally loaded topic can produce a shaky voice. A memory piece may have gaps that require filling in of missing details through imagination and/or research. A story of first love may have to battle sentimentality and cliché. A piece based on extensive research may lack a compelling voice and narrative flow.

In reading drafts over the years, our own and countless others, we have identified some common needs that writers face while working to make their drafts better. Here are ten to consider:

Adjusting a Shaky Voice

Even in a solid draft, we can lose the voice we needed to maintain our rapport with the reader. We may sound stiff in parts, moving from informal to overly formal, usually when attempting to offer information or opinion. Or we can get too chatty for our purpose or audience. Or we may shift from child to adult without justification. (*Tip:* This problem often reveals itself in a random shift between present tense and past tense within a sentence or paragraph.) Reading aloud is the best way to find a problematic voice. Your ear will hear where you need to rewrite a passage in a more convincing voice. And if the whole draft sounds flat, don’t bother to revise. Instead, start again.

Facing the Dragon

There are tensions in every piece; it's often these tensions that draw us, usually unconsciously, to our subject. Revision makes these tensions conscious—for writer and reader—if we are willing to write toward them. Writer Sue Miller calls the process “facing your dragon.” In a talk on revision (pp. 344–355), she describes the difficulties she faced when writing a memoir about her father's Alzheimer's disease. It took years because she was struggling with underlying tensions that involved her lifelong relationship with her father. Until she confronted what she had avoided and faced this “dragon,” the book remained stalled. That is what writers must do, she says, “whether they triumph (slay the dragon), or whether they're defeated (are slain, devoured).” Happy to say, her memoir, *The Story of My Father*, is now in print. Here's an excerpt:

My first memory of my father, for instance, is not truly of him but of his absence. Actually, it's one of my first clear memories of any kind. My earlier recollections are fragmentary, odd home movies that show only an out-of-context scene or two before breaking off and flickering dark. This memory, though, is sharp and clear—it has meaning for me as well as detail. And the meaning is that my father has left us: he's gone away.

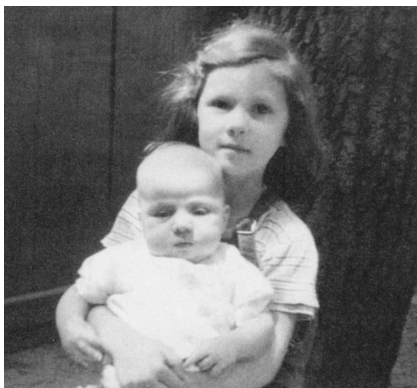
This was the scene: I was five. My father was in Germany for a long stay, a half-year stay. On a warm early summer's day, a friend of my parents came to take pictures of us—of my mother and my younger sister and baby brother and me—to send to him. Peculiarly, I can remember clearly the chair we sat in to be photographed. It was painted a bright blue. It had been set out in the backyard for this session. The backyard was a communal one, behind several apartment buildings on the south side of Chicago in the university neighborhood—Hyde Park. The yard was hard-packed dirt for the most part, worn barren by the play of all the children who used it daily. The chair looked strange to me, out of place and wrong, plopped down out there.

What I remember most of the picture taking was the sense of yearning connection I felt, thinking of my father as I looked straight into the camera.

Thinking of my picture, but not me, going to him, far across the ocean. He had been away at that point for three or four months—he left soon after my baby brother was born—and would be gone about three months more.

My memory, then,
is not really of him
but of the effort of
trying to construct
him in my mind, of
struggling to imagine
him, of missing him.
My memory is of
memory, working to
find its object.

—*The Story of
My Father*



Copyright Sue Miller

Notice how Miller's ease with language in this final version does not reveal the years of struggle and countless revisions from which that ease emerged.

Sharpening the Focus

Often a piece seems to be about two things that may or may not be connected. We call this a *split focus*. The writer, in revision, must ask: Which of these is most important? What's the piece really about? And how are the parts connected? Is there a form that can contain both? The answer will involve strengthening those connections, subordinating one to the other or, maybe, dropping one for another time. But think hard before dropping completely. There's a temptation to "keep it simple"—too simple, so that what remains is clearer, but duller and tension free. The aim in revision is to cut what doesn't serve the story and keep what complicates or contradicts. That's where the tensions lie.

Transforming Shopping List Narratives

What we call a *shopping list* narrative is prose that lists fact after fact and event after event without selection or point of view. *This happened and then this happened, and then this, and this....* Such narratives reflect what Vivian Gornick means by "the situation" without "the story." To avoid such lists, choose key points to develop, the ones that matter most. Quickly summarize the others or drop them as irrelevant to serving this particular story. The principle is the same whether you are writing a research paper, easily prone to become a shopping list of facts

and quotations with minimum interpretation, or a travel memoir, easily prone to become a catalogue of everything that happened day by day.

The same problem can occur when writing autobiographically:

I was born in Westwood, New Jersey, and lived with my parents, younger brother, and maternal grandmother until I was 7. Then my father requested a job transfer, and we moved to Bridgewater, where I spent the next 17 years of my life, going to a public elementary school, a Catholic high school, and then finally springing to a college near Atlantic City, where I started going to frat parties. I majored in literature and discovered poetry.

Readers won't care much about our student Nicole Ross' list of life events until she finds a focus for an assignment that asked her to write her life story in four pages. Organized around "the stories we tell," Nicole produces a draft that has promise:

We all have stories, I think, and the stories we tell are carefully chosen. There's the story in which I dance on the table, am witty beyond belief, and everyone wants me. I'm also wearing a slinky black dress and fishnets. That's the one I tell to attractive guys who look at me a certain way. Then there's the story I tell to my conservative grandparents about the latest fraternity party I went to—minus the alcohol, the cops in the bushes, and the guy looped in chains and reeking of Coolwater.

No one cares except your Mama. Unless you make them care.

—NATALIE KUSZ

Adding the Opposing Point of View

Opposing points of view (OPV) add layers of complexity and build in more tension. Rather than eliminate those who don't agree with us, don't like us, or don't support our point of view, let them make their cases. They will help us do what Bret Lott calls, "challenging [our] own assumptions"—a necessary act if meanings are to deepen, moving us closer to the dragon's fire. Events that contradict the main

story also count as OPV. If, for example, you are writing about a miserable year, add a good moment and explore it rather than omit everything good.

Developing Back-Story

Early drafts tend to lack contexts. They tell one story without filling the reader in about the background of characters and places that add dimension to the events. Revision—in the form of riffs that can be a line, a paragraph, or a page or more—allows us to add descriptions or events that occurred before the story began or reflections that happened after the events ended. Back-story lets us tell more about main characters. It lets us insert research about place, or history, or culture, all of which enrich the storyline.

Adjusting Pacing

Revision means tightening parts that move too slowly and lingering in places where the story moves too fast. That's called *pacing*, and it determines how well the narrative flows, dramatically and thematically. We decide where to speed up and slow down by looking at what we want the overall piece to accomplish. Take our opening to Chapter 6 on workshopping. We began with this initial draft, which goes on and on:

When we imagine a writer at work, how often do we see a person, alone, staring at the blank page or the computer screen, struggling for words? How frequently is our image a pain-filled one, the writer, exhausted, the floor strewn with crumpled paper, the story or essay finally finished, each word arrived at through an agonizing search? And once the writer has produced a draft, how eagerly does he or she seek an audience, a friend or a colleague, to share the words wrung so painstakingly from inside? Our answer? Hardly ever.

For most of us, writing is, admittedly, a struggle. And once we have written what we consider to be a decent draft—or sometimes any draft at all—the last thing we want to do is show it to someone else. So much simpler to hand it in and let it go at that. The assignment is finished; the task is complete; it's time to move on to other, more pressing or pleasurable tasks.

This is the scenario as we have come to know it and live it in most colleges and universities.

Several revisions later, 237 words are now the 65 words that ended up in print:

For most of us, the first stage of writing is a solitary struggle to produce a decent draft, something that interests us, something with potential. But what happens next, when we want to improve the draft? The struggle can remain a solitary one, or we can try to bring other views and voices into our writing by doing what is often called “workshopping a draft.”

Why did we cut the rest? Because we decided that not everyone hates to start writing. Because this is a chapter about workshoping, not writer's block. And because it was taking us too long to make our case. If we wanted readers to get excited about workshoping, we needed to pick up the pace. Notice, however, that we also added several phrases to line one, lingering on the word “decent.”

At that point we felt we needed to slow down and not rush by the idea too quickly. *Tip:* To decide on pacing, look for one section overpowering others, and then either cut back, flesh out the others, or both.

Remembering that the Hotter the Subject, the Cooler the Language—and Vice Versa

Highly emotional subjects need understated language while small, silly topics often benefit from exaggerated language. So if you write, “My first love was the most wonderfully exciting thing in my life!” the reader yawns. But if you write, “My front stoop was the most wonderfully exciting thing in my life!” the reader gets interested.

Imagining Your Toughest Reader

Pulitzer prize-winner Stephen Dunn says that once he has a promising draft, he imagines what his creative writing teacher, Donald Justice, would say to him, and he keeps that in mind while deciding if he's finished or not. Thinking of a tough but fair critic helps us find the weak spots before our readers do.

Attending to Copyediting

Lining up subject/verb agreement, adjusting tenses, deciding whether to use two dashes or two commas in a parenthetical phrase: these all

make the text better, as does the more obvious editing of spelling and punctuation. But don't substitute these editing concerns for more substantive revision. Line-by-line editing should come last after substantive revisions are more or less complete.

The Rewriter's Toolbox

Here are the basic tools that make all of the above happen. Depending on writing style and what's on the page, some get used more than others, but skilled writers have mastered them all.

Adding

All writers, not only underwriters, need to flesh out early drafts. This can involve adding more sensory detail to make characters and scenes come alive; adding dialogue; adding back-story so readers know more about the context for the story; adding the opposing point of view to provide tension and perspective; adding other voices; adding reflection to show the writer's mind at work; and adding information gleaned from research. The challenge, in revision, is to work in this new information so that the seams don't show.

Cutting and Tightening

Less is often more, as Picasso's bulls show; cutting can crystallize meaning and turn a dull voice into a lively one. Writers with a draft rich in detail often cut all but the best away. That can mean a phrase, a paragraph, or even pages—either because they digress ineffectually or go on too long. Cutting on the sentence level eliminates words that don't carry their weight. "To be" verbs are likely targets, and so are adjectives and adverbs. Keep those that surprise most and get rid of the others. Also look closely at repetitions. Some energize the narrative, as in this lyrical opening to Robert Vivian's "Driving to the River":

Driving to the river is listening to the highway moan in cold asphalt, syllables that rasp a clean wave from Omaha to Lincoln. Driving to the river is looking ahead, past the curve of I-80 where the horizon glows in soft ambers at sunrise, and the sudden, gleaming promise of the Platte near Ashland. Driving to the river is finding that delicate bird-bone in the schoolyard you could almost put in your mouth,

which has waited months and years for your small hand to bring it back to the land of the living and the dying.

But other repetitions slow down the text, making the reader say, “I know that already!” Overusing transitional phrases are particularly deadly:

We entered the living room. Once we entered the living room, we saw the portrait of Jefferson. This portrait was propped against the living room wall.

Tip: Some writers are so convinced about the efficacy of cutting that once they think their drafts are finished, they make themselves cut 100 words or more from, say, a ten-page draft. Their work almost always improves.

Rearranging

While rereading, an idea on page two might seem to fit better with what's said on page five. Using computers makes rearranging easy: you can try different versions and decide later. When looking for more focus, some writers make an outline of their drafts. Every time a new topic is introduced they add it to the outline; then they look for patterns, asking themselves what seems to go together, what might need to be moved, and what might work in juxtaposition.

Substituting

Early drafts provide us with the gist of what we want to say, but our strongest language often comes from time spent examining the words on the page and imagining other choices. Often moving from general to specific makes all the difference, the specifics leading us into new meanings—even at the sentence level:

We ate in our favorite restaurant in New York. We loved going there. It brought back so many memories.

We ate at Jubilee, a favorite little bistro on East 54th Street and felt, at least that one night, that we were in love again.

Layering and Weaving

Once we are well into our work, we often discover an image or a refrain that feels as if it is the heart of what we are saying. It may appear early on and disappear, or it may come once, late in the

draft. Revision is the time to strengthen its potential by layering and weaving. Layering deepens work, allowing us to complicate without sacrificing cohesion. Weaving pulls the layers through the work, so that the new depth is not just on one page but on every page. We did this, for example, by layering Gornick's notion of "the situation and the story" throughout this chapter, hopefully making the concept of revision clearer. In "Mastering the Art of French Cooking," E.J. Levy also weaves and layers an image of Julia Child's cookbook, so each reappearance deepens the essay's meaning (see pp. 215–223).

Copyediting

The final stage of revision is attending to the grammar, spelling, and punctuation. No piece, no matter how powerful, will be treated seriously without the writer's attention to form.

Revision in Action by Three Writers

1. Kim Stafford, whose essay, "The Writer as Professional Eavesdropper," is in this anthology (pp. 335–343), has shared his revision process with us. We pass it on to you so you can see how this essay evolved. The genesis was a series of teaching notes that Kim wrote to himself in 1986:
 - ✿ Writing is easy or satisfying or both when individual episodes of writing erupt from the rich, on-going conversations of my life.
 - ✿ I overhear and read gifts of knowing; I send and receive letters engaged in the weaving of life and story.
 - ✿ I try to live joyfully in the presence of opportunities, hospitable texts the world constantly offers me. I don't write; I write back.
 - ✿ Writing is the crystal that forms by certain faceted shapes and technical details within a solution too richly saturated to remain fluid.

Two years later, these ideas became the first paragraph in an essay Stafford wrote about his professional life. That paragraph then became the second paragraph of the recent revision included here.

2. In his address to the nation after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt replaced the words "world history," with the word "infamy," turning an informative sentence into a memorable one. Line editing this speech, Roosevelt pays attention to words, word order, and punctuation, but he leaves the basics alone. The structure, or what Annie Dillard calls "the bearing walls," are holding up.

DRAFT No. 1

December 7, 1941.

PROPOSED MESSAGE TO THE CONGRESS

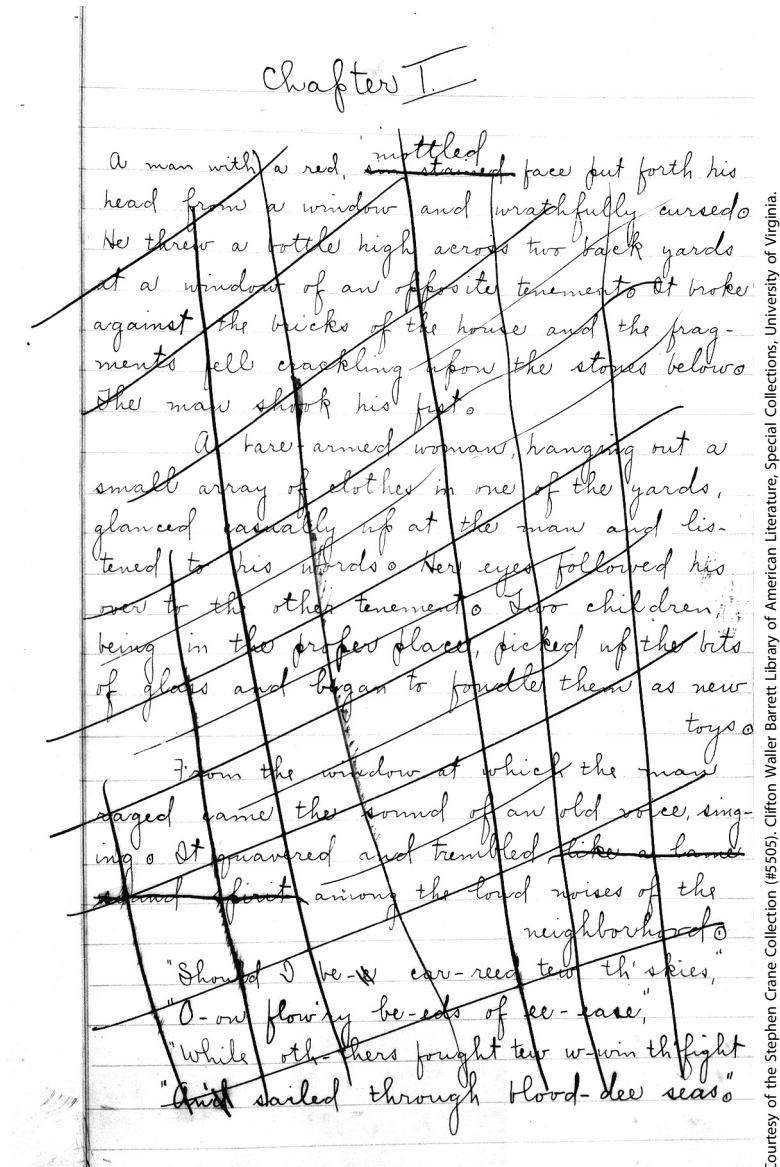
Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will live in ~~world history~~ ^{infamy}
 the United States of America was ~~unprovokedly~~ ^{suddenly} and deliberately attacked
 by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan, ~~which has since~~

The United States was at the moment at peace with that nation and was
~~continuing~~ ^{still in} conversations with its Government and its Emperor looking
 toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific. Indeed, one hour after
 Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in ~~Hawaii and the Philippines~~ ^{Dahu}
 the Japanese Ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered
 to the Secretary of State a formal reply to a ~~former~~ ^{recent American} message, ~~from the~~
~~Secretary~~ ^{While}. This reply ~~contained a statement~~ ^{stated} that diplomatic negotiations
~~must be considered at an end, but~~ ^{it} contained no threat ~~and~~ ^{or} hint of ~~an~~ ^{war or}
 armed attack.

It will be recorded that the distance ~~between~~ ^{of} ~~Hawaii and~~ ^{especially} of
 Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that these attacks ~~were~~ ^{were} deliberately
 planned many days ^{or 7000 weeks} ago. During the intervening time the Japanese Govern-
 ment has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false
 statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

SOURCE: Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library

3. In this opening page from Stephen Crane's book, *George's Mother*, the author finds nothing is salvageable.



More often than not, revisions can build on what is there, as President Roosevelt does, but sometimes, like Crane, we may need to start again. What's important is to save all drafts because the

next day what we find in an old draft may become a new start for “the story.”

Ways In ...

1. Take an early draft that you plan to do more with. Make a diagnosis of what you think it needs, using the list of revision strategies from earlier in the chapter as your guide. Try them.
2. Compare one of your early drafts with a later draft. List the kinds of changes you have made. Which tools—adding, cutting, rearranging, layering, copyediting—did you use the most? Which, the least? Now choose a different piece and try using the strategies you *rarely* use.
3. Take a draft you feel is almost finished. Cut 5 to 10 percent of the words. Do you miss anything you eliminated? *Tip*: Study each line for unnecessary adjectives or phrases.
4. Revisit Robin Scarlett’s freelisting of “Lists I Could Make” in Chapter 3. Her list was written quickly as part of an exercise. If she were going to do more with it, which lines might she cut or rearrange? Compare your suggestions for revision with others, discussing your reasons.

Note: The answer to the Kay Boyle query: B is the first draft, C is second, and A is her final version. Would you say she is an underwriter or an overwriter?