
LESSON 14

WINDOWS ON YOUR WRITING: Revision, part 3—Micro-revision

Supplies: “Lesson 14 Worksheet”; “Style Cheat Sheet”; “Lessons in Bad Style”; “Lesson in Bad Grammar”

Goal: to familiarize students with techniques for revising their essays effectively

Suggested Time: 4 sessions

SESSION 1

Quote of the Day: “Style is to forget all styles.” —Jules Renard

Warm-up

In your notebook, warm up for your lesson by spending 10-15 minutes writing a journal entry on one of these three options:

- 1) Free-write: Remember the one rule—let your mind and hand relax, and just write without stopping to think until your time is up. Nonsense is okay. Self-censoring is not.
- 2) Choose a subject/topic of interest to you and write about it. Don’t worry about making it a “complete” essay or even a neat and logical one. Just stay on the topic and explore.
- 3) Respond to this prompt: Write about one of your pet peeves.

When you are finished with your warm-up, have your parent check off your lesson-planning log to confirm that you completed it.

Introduction

We are nearing the end of our study of basic composition. Our next and final unit 3 lesson will be all about spit-shining your hard work so that it glows. This lesson, however, covers the transition between the hard work of composing and the relief of final presentation. It is all about improving your language usage, or “micro-revision.” In more common terms, this is the step of the writing process called “editing.”

In level 1 I discussed at length the six traits of excellent writing, which form the focus of my essay evaluations. Incorporating each trait into your writing will be important as we move into essay writing in units 4 and 5, so we will review them here and begin to use them in this lesson. They include...

- *beauty*—using language and presenting content in both an appropriate and aesthetically pleasing way
- *truth*—conveying ideas and emotion with honesty and integrity; being authentic on the page
- *audience*—tailoring your essay for a specific potential audience (except for those in which you are writing for personal reasons or self-expression)
- *purpose*—writing for a specific, audience-centered reason, so that you are writing to do something *to or for* your target audience to affect them a certain way (NOTE: In this context “purpose” does not refer to your own personal reasons for writing, which are valid and may be many; it has to do with how you want to connect with your audience and what you want to accomplish.)
- *tone*—the manner in which you speak to your audience so as to effectively accomplish your purpose; the attitude you convey
- *voice*—the quality of being yourself on the page; speaking in a way that sounds like *you*, not someone else or an impersonal textbook (NOTE: This is not the same thing as style. A skilled writer can write in many different styles but develops only one distinctive personal voice.)

As you begin the final stage of the revision process—micro-revision, or editing—you will need to take a close look at a number of details, all of which point back to these six

traits. Although we have not yet discussed “voice” (that will happen in unit 4), you have learned enough about writing to examine your work to see how well you have done on the other five traits.

Each of the six traits relates to both content and language usage, so they should be in the front of your mind from the beginning of the writing process from this point forward. In the editing stage that we will cover in this lesson, you will zoom in on the tiny details of your work, details that add up to a big impact on your essay in terms of the six traits of excellent writing. This means that you must put aside concern for your content, now, to focus only on your language usage. Though this subject is large enough for whole books, we will lay a foundation for how to edit effectively in this lesson.

The lesson will contain four parts, each of which will only skim the surface of what you need to learn over the next few years as you practice and hone your skills. This is because, again, we only have time to lay a foundation. The skill of editing, like revision, is one that incorporates many smaller skills and thus takes time to master.

Lesson, part 1: Personal style

As you become more and more comfortable with the many skills involved in crafting well-developed essays and papers, something very important will happen without you realizing it. You will begin to forget most of what you learned in this course. You may even nearly forget that you ever took this course. With practice, you will master the writing process so completely that it becomes natural, like swimming, riding a bike, or reading a book, and all the lessons you learned about writing will fade in your memory. You will naturally begin to include a hook and a thesis statement, a conclusion and solid support for your main ideas, and so on. It will become second nature. That you reach this point is important, because it will free you to take your focus on off of basic skills and put it where it belongs--your content, style, and

presentation. You will only need to remember the theory behind your writing when it's time to analyze your work for strengths and weaknesses during the revision stage.

We have already discussed content and will discuss both content and presentation more in future lessons, but here and in part 2 we will discuss style. The first kind is personal style. It is closely related to tone, mood, and voice. When your writing has a strong personal style, it means that you have developed a manner of writing that reflects your personality, your typical manner of speaking, the attitude you have taken with the topic of a given piece of writing, and the mood you evoke in your piece. Just as you can express your personal style through the way you dress, you can do the same in your writing.

To write with a strong personal style, however—a style that is appealing and engaging to your readers—you must be comfortable with using your native language skillfully. When you have mastered your language with its many grammar, spelling, and mechanical rules, then you are in the best position to manipulate it to express your ideas stylishly.

Developing personal style also depends heavily on the literature you choose to read and the movies, music, and television you choose to hear. Even if you don't intend to do so when you read or listen to something, you *are* in fact learning a lot about language. You pick up vocabulary, grammar, rhythms, sentence constructions, literary devices, idioms, clichés, different kinds of syntax (sentence word order and arrangements), and common phrases when you read and listen. These language elements become part of your learning, and they eventually come out in your speech and writing. For this reason, as well as others outside the scope of this lesson, choosing good-quality entertainment is profoundly important to your development as a writer. So be picky in what you choose to read and hear. Choose the best you can find. Someday it will show up in your writing.

HOW TO EDIT FOR PERSONAL STYLE:

Personal style in writing influences how well you show the traits of truth, beauty, tone, and voice in your writing, and it is a tricky element to edit effectively. When you establish a personal style, it will be a part of you, just like the way you talk and walk and laugh. You can control your style by changing your tone and other ways you use language, but you will find that some of your typical writing habits are not easy to change, because you are so used to them. They are part of your personal, habitual style.

If you try to change the sound of your voice, a concept we'll discuss in unit 4, you won't have much luck with that. It is a much better idea to relax into your own voice and change other aspects of your style, such as your tone. As you edit your essays, then, look closely at your personal style by considering whether you convey your ideas in the manner you intend. Is your tone right for the piece? Do you set an appropriate mood? Whether your tone is formal or informal, does your diction (word choices) sound like words you actually have in your vocabulary, or does it sound like you've used the thesaurus a little too much?

Lesson, part 2: Conventional style

The second kind of style you need to consider when you edit is conventional style. This has to do with speaking and writing in a manner that is considered "good style" in educated society. It influences the traits of beauty and attention to audience in your writing. Conventional style is different from personal style, but it can contribute to the development of your personal style. For example, if you break a lot of style conventions, that reflects on your personal style. This can work for or against you. If you do it artistically, like many excellent writers have done, it is like wearing an amazing outfit that stands out in a crowd, drawing admiring glances everywhere you go. If you

do it poorly, however, it is like wearing outdated or ugly clothing. You may be decently dressed, but other people will form unfavorable judgments about you based on your clothing. In writing you can break all the rules of good style and still break no grammar rules. This is completely your choice, but it will affect the way your readers receive your ideas.

END OF SAMPLE