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## LESSON 19

### THE NEXT DRAFT: How to Be Your Own Editor

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Supplies: pen/pencil; highlighter or colored pencils (optional); writing notebook; one essay or report that you have written within the past year (ungraded, preferably); the following handouts: “Secrets of Successful Revision,” “College Isn’t Really Necessary,” and “How Is My Paragraph”

Goal: to establish the habit of looking more closely at the first draft in order to revise it

Suggested Time: 3 sessions

Resource Credits: “All Writing is Rewriting,” *The Denver Post* (6/19/2012); “College Isn’t Really Necessary,” by Lynzee Stauss; *Step Up to Writing*, by Maureen Auman

## SESSION 1

### Warm-up

These warm-up exercises should be checked by your parent for completion. Remember that I will check on these warm-ups at the end of the unit, and they will be given a grade. The warm-ups should be done at the beginning of every writing study session.

1. 10-15 minute warm-up in your notebook (lesson 2, your choice).
2. Practice active reading by marking up the lesson or any reading for another subject—at least three pages.
3. Re-read one entry in your writing notebook and find at least one way you could improve it. Jot your idea below the entry, as you may have the opportunity to revise the entry at some point in the future.

## Introduction

In the revision step you are required to put on your editor's hat for the first time since you began your writing project. Whereas in the prewriting and drafting steps you are allowed to play, explore, and make any number of mistakes without concern, you may no longer do so in the revision step. This is because this third step of the writing process is all about evaluating the quality of your work and determining how it could be improved.

Many writers dislike revising their work, because it often involves cutting parts they like, rewriting new parts, and doing more research or brainstorming for parts that are lacking in sufficient detail. Sometimes authors even realize that their approach to their topic is all wrong, so they must start all over again! Obviously, this can be tedious and time-consuming, especially if the project wasn't much fun to begin with. Worse, editors at publishing houses often require authors to revise over and over and *over* again, sometimes even asking them to make changes that the authors don't like. If the authors refuse to make those changes, the publishing house may refuse to publish their work. Understandably, this is where the writing process can become not only difficult, but also painful.

On the other hand, there are many other professional writers whose *favorite* part of the writing process is the revision step! Why? What pleasure or satisfaction could there possibly be in reworking a manuscript on which they've already spent considerable time? The truth is that for some writers this is where the fun of writing begins, because they've spilled out their basic ideas onto paper (or the computer) and can relax a little. The hard work of generating an introduction, body, and conclusion is completed. Now they can take their rough draft and mold it into a well-crafted manuscript that reflects their best work.

Although this work can be strenuous and time-consuming, it can be satisfying to have the basic gist of what you want to say written down and then find ways to improve

it. The tricky part is in learning *how* to do it, for revision (when done well) is a complex affair involving both the creative and analytical sides of your brain. While there are many books written just to help writers revise effectively, this lesson will be a relatively easy introduction to the art of revising—just enough to get you started. More detailed revision lessons will be given in level 2.

## Lesson, part 1: Five Important Tools for Revising Your Work

While there are many ways authors tackle their rough drafts in order to improve them, you will only learn five in this lesson. Each of them is easy to understand and put into practice, but it may take awhile before you are comfortable using them. The exercises at the end will give you a good start, but as with anything new, practice can't stop with the homework assignment! Plan to make each of these tools and techniques part of your writer's toolbox.

1. **RUBRICS:** You can't very well revise effectively if you don't have a clear idea of what the final product could look like at its best, can you? If you don't know what to reach for, you will only fumble in the dark and hope you hit a light switch. Reading quality literature will develop an understanding of the difference between "good" and "bad" writing, but this takes much time and reflection. Although immersing yourself deeply in literary masterpieces is essential for becoming an excellent writer, you can also make use of a tool called a "rubric" to give you a boost. Not only will it help to clarify in your mind the elements of excellent writing, it will also help you master them so that you won't always need a guide.

But what is a rubric? This lip-twisting term simply refers to a kind of recipe or plan for various types of projects—usually written or artistic ones. They describe the elements that a project needs to contain, so that the student assigned the project can be certain of doing a thorough job that reflects his or her best work. Rubrics can take

many different forms. They can be very detailed and formal or sketchy and informal, and they can be formatted in various ways.

I love rubrics! I was first introduced to them in my freshman college English course. Dr. Black was a strict teacher—pleasant, but no-nonsense and challenging. Up to that point I was familiar only with scrawled comments in the margins of my papers with a fat, red-letter grade at the top, but Dr. Black handed out a rubric with each assignment. It detailed exactly what she expected from the class on the assignment, so that we understood exactly what we needed to do to earn an “A.” At first I wasn’t sure how I felt about Dr. Black’s rubrics (more paperwork!), but as I took more English classes with other professors who did not use rubrics, I began to see the value of them.

As a teacher now, myself, I always use rubrics when I assign papers and projects, so that students know what their papers need to include in order for them to be complete and polished. You will not always have rubrics to guide you, though. Many teachers choose not to use them, and beyond school you will sometimes need to complete writing tasks and other projects that will not be graded.

Even so, you can still make use of this revision tool when you are in these situations. By using rubrics consistently you will internalize the important elements of composition and will eventually be able to judge your own work by remembering what to look for. This, in fact, is what authors do to prepare their manuscripts for publication. They study, practice, and master the principles of good writing, and then they prepare their manuscripts according to the general expectations and requirements of the publishing houses where they want to sell their work. Most do not use a formal rubric, as I do for this course, but many use checklists and books on revision and editing to help them mold their rough drafts into a polished piece of work.

Before we move on to the next tool, I do need to make one caution about the use of rubrics. They are helpful, but they are not magic. They will make your writing neither perfect nor a work of art. They are a learning tool that will simply help ensure that you

have not overlooked anything important as you revise and polish. In the end, both now and in the future, it is your artistic sense that must guide you in elevating your writing above a simple “recipe” to the beautiful and memorable. Remember, writing is both an art and a craft! Rubrics help you with learning the writing craft in a reasonable amount of time. Your artistic sense will only develop with time and practice.

**STOP and open the handout, “How Is My Paragraph?” This is a good rubric to use when evaluating your own writing, at least until you advance to multi-paragraph essays, so please print it out and paste it into your writing notebook. I will provide a more complex rubric in level 2.**

*End of sample.*