Revision*: Does It Mean Editing, Using More* <u>Precise</u> *Language, Being "Specific," or –?*

In a wonderful essay about her poetry, "*When We Dead Awaken*: Writing as Re-Vision," Adrienne Rich links the title of a play by Henrik Ibsen with the fullest definition of re-vision: "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction."[1] The third assignment gives you the chance not just to respond to Professor Eiland's comments but also to polish and re-shape your argument, to re-see the significance of the passage, and to add information to the essay.

A revision is to a paper as an engine overhaul is to a car: much more than a lube, oil, and filter change. Another analogy would be that revision is to a paper as a total makeover is to someone's regular hair and clothing: more than brushing the hair and ironing. Visualize the results you would expect from the re-building of an engine or a visit from the team of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* or a beauty magazine; next imagine the extent to which you can transform your paper. Adding detailing to the hood of a car, trimming bangs, or "fixing" awkward wording in your paper merely skims the surface.

You may wonder **what your paper should look like**, anyway. Here's an outline:

1st PP: Location of passage, its context, discussion leading up to thesis, forecast

2nd   Evidence for thesis broken into discrete units, with each PP connected to the thesis
3rd   or backbone so the string of topic sentences creates a skeleton of the argument.
N-1

Concluding PP: Include references to major points (but not full repetition) so you benefit
        from all the analysis in the paragraphs; remind readers of the separate points but
        try to combine or apply them in a new way. A conclusion that merely repeats
        earlier information seems limp instead of impressive. Connect the passage to
        other parts of the text, the ending, the development of a character, or whatever
        seems appropriate and a large enough point to seem conclusive.

How should I begin the paper?

The introduction should *skip generalities* about love, marriage, human nature, and other large topics. Feel free to start by describing the passage or its significance. You will probably describe the location of the passage in the book, the characters involved, the issues they discuss or the events that occur, and related contextual points   Ideally, the first paragraph will contain a **thesis**, often in the last sentence or two. Also ideally, a **forecast** will suggest major topics in the order your paper will discuss them. If you say, "The passage reveals Pip's A, B, and C," your paper should cover A, then B, and then C.

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[1] David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky, eds., *Ways of Reading: An Anthology for Writers*, 5th ed., (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999) 604.

What should the point of this paper be? Or, **What kind of paper should I write?**

A paper for this course offers your *interpretation of the passage in terms of its significance*.   Perhaps the passage marks a lowpoint in Pip's moral development, a most painful moment of self-consciousness or humiliation by Estella, or Darcy's shift from chilly disappointment in his conversation with Elizabeth to attraction to her and forgiveness of her pertness. State that as a temporary thesis to get started.

The thesis should be intriguing or at least **not obvious, controversial** (not everyone who has read the text would agree with it), and **in need of support** (it makes a claim that requires supporting evidence).   Often, it appears in the end of a draft. Steal it from the end, plunk it in the first paragraph, and fill the hold in the conclusion later.

Should the paper list the kinds of literary techniques the author uses, stick to one technique, or something else?

This question touches on both the *organization* of the paper and the *approach* it takes. To address the latter first, remember that this course stresses close reading, or close attention to passages in texts. One rationale is that examining the "micro" scale will include the "macro" themes and concerns of the texts, but staying on a "macro" scale will overlook the finer textures. Combing through a passage word by word for connotations, figurative language, levels of diction, resonant spots, and so on should help you generate ideas about the passage's significance.

As for the *organization* of the paper, you might list the significance or techniques in the first sentence, then those in the second, and so on; that would be unexciting and unsophisticated. Instead try grouping the *effects* of parts of the passage as you take notes about it: do certain words, phrases, and ideas reveal Pip's arrogance, in particular his notion of himself as superior? Group them together in an outline and a paragraph. Do the same thing for parts of the passage that reveal Biddy's reactions, whether mild, upset, defensive, or other; group them in a paragraph or paragraphs, too.

How do I know when a paragraph is too short or too long?

No set answer exists, but I am leery of any paragraph less than three sentences long and of any that lasts a whole page. Something in between generally works. The rule governing the paragraph is that all of it should elaborate a main idea. One sentence doesn't seem complicated enough to require a complete paragraph, while a page-long paragraph is daunting and might work better both visually and logically if split into two.

A **basic pattern** for a paragraph might be the following three kinds of sentences:
--A **topic sentence** or main idea (like the thesis in the paper);
--an **explanatory sentence**(s), because the topic should require some explanation; &
--an **example** (especially words from the passage) to clarify the point .

What should I do when a phrase in my paper is marked "awk"?

The abbreviation for "awkward" indicates that words do not sound right or work well together, or both. In conferences, ask about any comments you do not understand. On your own, read the words out loud to see if you would use them in slightly formal speech (not slang). If not, you may be trying too hard and using "shoulder-padded" words that get in the way. Simplify. Use the shortest, clearest words you can without resorting to a limited vocabulary. Try re-stating the idea as if for normal conversation. Check words in the dictionary if you are not sure about their meanings.

How can I correct a passage marked "specify"?

Usually the area that needs to be more specific represents a shorthand to yourself: you know the ideas attached to it but the reader does not, so you must unfold your ideas (see pattern for paragraph). Until someone invents the telepathy chip, you must put your ideas in words that clearly convey your ideas. One instance that requires this is a general reference: instead of saying the *sentence, or passage* illustrates Mrs. Bennet's foolish-ness, point out the *words, phrases,* and *banalities* that reveal her silliness. Quote her.

Sometimes the comment, "Be specific," requires you to **name** the precise stage of romantic development, moral education, self-knowledge, or other process instead of saying, for instance, that a passage illustrates a stage, kind of knowledge, relationship, etc. Instead of "food," for example, you might write, "the pork pie and port." Again, try re-stating your point out loud to see if your speaking abilities assist your writing.

What is a dangling modifier?

If I say, "Hanging out the window, I saw my scarf," what do you see? If you see my scarf waving in the breeze, your logic has corrected or ignored the grammar. If you picture me, hands raised and fingers gripped, you realize that not just the modifying phrase but I am dangling in the sentence. Reason: the agent of an action must follow a phrase with a participle (-ing form of a verb). Whatever noun follows "Looking at this subject objectively" must be the agent of the looking.

What one strategy will improve my paper the most?

The answers vary depending on the level of revision. If you spend time revising sentence by sentence, two strategies apply: promote your **main idea to the main clause** and use **strong verbs**. On the level of paragraphs, make sure each one includes a **topic sentence** and **supports the thesis**: make an explicit connection. Include a **clear and lively thesis in the introduction. Remind readers of your main points** in the conclusion (I call this "landing your points") but **surprise them** with something not mentioned before.

Best for last: why did you pick the passage? What appeals to you? Remember your reactions, articulate them as a basis for stating the significance of the passage, & include.