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## Revision: Overcoming a Paralyzing Fear

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Revision: Overcoming a Paralyzing Fear

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ENGL 4910

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### Abstract

Revision is a difficult task to undertake. In many cases, it is a fear that paralyzes students. There are many benefits to revision that students may not understand. This may be one reason why it is so intimidating for students to revise a paper. Tutors should help students recognize that revision allows them to see where they can improve content organization, notice grammatical errors, and be more confident in their writing. Tutors should also give students specific tips to make the revision process easier.

You finish writing your essay after working on it for hours. The last thing you want to do is reread the paper, let alone look for places that you need to work on. Revising can seem like a daunting task. In many cases, students who come to the writing center have skipped this revision step because it causes anxiety and even fear. The job of a writing tutor is to help students recognize the value of revision and give them strategies to make revision a simpler task. The tutor can help students overcome their anxiety and fear of revision.

There are two main stages of revision. The first stage is called global revision (Ryan 37). This encompasses the overall flow and structure of the paper. When working on global revision, students may think about their thesis, supporting claims, audience, or even the entire organization of the paper. The second stage is called sentence-level revision (Ryan 39). This is the fine-tuning of the paper. Students in this stage are working on specific sentences that may sound choppy, or have incorrect grammar. Global revision, however, seems to be the more intimidating stage of the revision process for students. After all, if your argument is weak, then you have to change most of your essay. Not just a sentence or two. This would require more work than simple word changes within a sentence. The thought of having to spend possibly a couple more hours on a paper can cause anxiety to students and prevent them from working more on it.

Students usually come into the writing center with concerns about grammar and citations (sentence-level revision), but after talking to them for a little bit I notice that their deeper concerns are about overall “flow” and their thesis (global revision). Before we even begin, students will apologize for their work saying, “I’m sorry, I still have a lot of work to do.” This is before I’ve even read the paper! In my experience, the students who struggle the most with confidence in their writing are the ones who have not looked over their paper since they wrote it.

Then when I have them read part of their essay, they are embarrassed about not reading through it beforehand. This is nothing to be self-conscious about. Revision is a necessary part of the writing process. Tutors should help students work through their insecurities in writing and help them see the benefits of revision.

There are many benefits to revising. Founder of the Purdue Writing Lab, Muriel Harris, wrote about how revising is a way for the student to determine where their writing ability is at and improve from that spot (Harris 89). Self-evaluation can be a difficult task, but that is the way students can get better. The purpose of writing is to convey a person's thoughts. Revising is a way that students can best convey their thoughts in the most efficient and appropriate manner. In my own experience as a tutor, I have found that students who have reviewed their papers multiple times are more confident in their writing going into their tutoring sessions. This is regardless of their writing ability. They usually know exactly what their concerns are and approach that section with confidence. The students who have not looked at their paper since writing it are usually unsure where to begin the revision process.

Tutors should give beneficial tips to students to make the revision process easier. In many tutor column essays, the main idea of the essay is to teach tutors to shape the tutoring session to the student's needs. Tutors should apply what they are learning in the tutor column essays and shape those beneficial tips regarding revision to the specific fears and anxieties the student has. When it comes to revision, there are many tips that the tutor can give. Tell the student to take a break from their paper and revisit it. After a student has worked on an essay for hours, it can be difficult for that student to pick up on any mistakes they may have committed while writing their essay. Motivation to change the essay is at a minimum after working hard on it. Something else the student can do is to have another pair of eyes look at the essay. In some cases, that second

pair of eyes is a tutor at the writing center! Encourage the student to revisit the writing center multiple times for the same paper. The more eyes that read the paper, the better the revision process can be. It is also less work for the student. The writing center is there to help with the revision process. Tutors should let the student know that revision is something that even professionals have to do. In order for an article to be published in a scholarly journal, that article has to be reviewed by several experts within that field (“Evaluating Information Sources”). In some cases, it can take months and even years to get published. Revision is not saved for just amateur writers, but every writer. This is something that the best writers do to make their writing better. Knowing this, students will be able to overcome the fear and anxiety preventing them from revising their paper.

Working with students through their anxieties and fears of revision is part of the job of a tutor. It is important for tutors to be aware of these concerns that students may have. Students will have worked hard on their essays, so tutors should make sure that when the student leaves their session, they feel uplifted. They should never feel as if their paper was picked apart. Tutors should attempt to make their session an enjoyable experience for the student, so they feel more inclined to come back to the writing center. Though revising can seem like such a paralyzing task, tutors need to ease the minds of the students to help them through this crucial step of the writing process. The next time that I meet with a student I cannot wait to give them tips to help them overcome their fears and anxieties of revision.

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