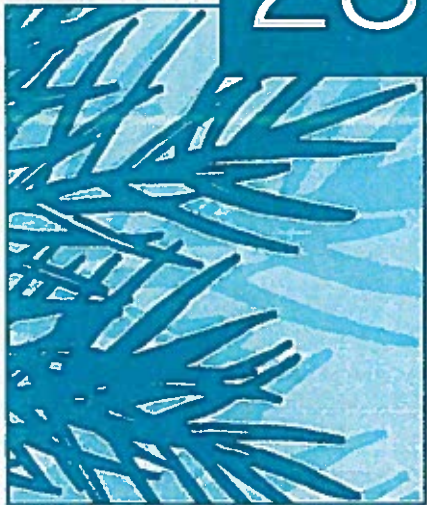


## Putting Your Revision Skills to Work



In Units 2 and 3, you learned to revise basic paragraphs, and in Unit 4, you learned to revise essays. All revising requires that you rethink and rewrite with such questions as these in mind:

Can a reader understand and follow my ideas?  
 Is my topic sentence or thesis statement clear?  
 Does the body of my paragraph or essay fully support the topic or thesis statement?  
 Does my paragraph or essay have unity? That is, does every sentence relate to the main idea?  
 Does my paragraph or essay have coherence? That is, does it follow a logical order and guide the reader from point to point?  
 Does my writing conclude, not just leave off?

Of course, the more writing techniques you learn, the more options you have as you revise. Unit 5 has moved beyond the basics to matters of style: consistency and parallelism, sentence variety, and clear, exact language. This chapter will guide you again through the revision process, adding questions like the following to your list:

Are my verb tenses and pronouns consistent?  
 Have I used parallel structure to highlight parallel ideas?  
 Have I varied the length and type of my sentences?  
 Is my language exact, concise, and fresh?

Many writers first revise and rewrite with questions like these in mind. They do *not* worry about grammar and minor errors at this stage. Then in a separate, final process, they **proofread\*** for spelling and grammatical errors.

\* For practice in proofreading for particular errors, see individual chapters in Units 6 and 7. For practice in proofreading for mixed errors, see Chapter 37, "Putting Your Proofreading Skills to Work."



Here are two sample paragraphs by students, showing the first draft, the revisions made by the student, and the revised draft of each. Each revision has been numbered and explained to give you a clear idea of the thinking process involved.

## Writing Sample 1

### First Draft

I like to give my best performance. I must relax completely before a show. I often know ahead of time what choreography I will use and what I'll sing, so I can concentrate on relaxing completely. I usually do this by reading, etc. I always know my parts perfectly. Occasionally I look through the curtain to watch the people come in. This can make you feel faint, but I reassure myself and say I know everything will be okay.

### Revisions

① *In order*

~~I like~~ to give my best performance. I must relax completely before a show.

② *and vocals*

I often know ahead of time what choreography I will use, and ~~what I'll sing~~;

③ *during that long, last hour before curtain,*

so I can concentrate on relaxing ~~completely~~. I usually do this by reading

④ *an action-packed mystery, but sometimes I joke with the*

~~etc.~~ ~~I always know my parts perfectly~~. Occasionally I ~~look~~ through the curtain to

⑦ *peek*

watch the ~~people~~ ~~come~~ in. This can make ~~you~~ feel faint, but I reassure myself

⑥ *audience file*

⑧ *me*

⑨ *"Yickie," I say, "the minute you're out there singing to the people, everything will be okay."* and say I know everything will be okay.

### Reasons for Revisions

1. Combine two short sentences. (sentence variety)
2. Make *choreography* and *vocals* parallel and omit unnecessary words. (parallelism)
3. Make time order clear: First discuss what I've done during the days before the performance, and then discuss the hour before performance. (time order)
4. Drop *completely*, which repeats the word used in the first sentence. (avoid wordiness)
5. This is important! Drop *etc.*, add more details, and give examples. (add examples)
6. This idea belongs earlier in the paragraph—with what I've done during the days before the performance. (order)
7. Use more specific and interesting language in this sentence. (exact language)
8. Use the first person singular pronouns *I* and *me* consistently throughout the paragraph. (consistent person)
9. Dull—use a direct quotation, the actual words I say to myself. (exact language, sentence variety)

## Revised Draft

In order to give my best performance, I must relax completely before a show. I often know ahead of time what choreography and vocals I will use, and I always know my parts perfectly, so during that long, last hour before curtain, I can concentrate on relaxing. I usually do this by reading an action-packed mystery, but sometimes I joke with the other performers or just walk around backstage. Occasionally I peek through the curtain to watch the audience file in. This can make me feel faint, but I reassure myself. "Vickie," I say, "the minute you're out there singing to the people, everything will be okay."

—Victoria DeWindt (Student)

## Writing Sample 2

### First Draft

My grandparents' house contained whole rooms that my parents' house did not (pantry, a parlor, a den where Grandpa kept his loot). The furniture and things always fascinated me. Best of all was the lake behind the house. Grandpa said that Evergreen Lake had grown old just like Grandma and him, that the game fish are gone and only a few bluegills remained. But one day he let me fish. No one thought I'd catch anything, but I caught a foot-long goldfish! Grandpa said it was a goddam carp, but it was a goldfish to me and I nearly fainted with ecstasy.

### Revisions

① Visiting my grandparents at Evergreen Lake was always an exotic adventure.

② Their cavernous ③

My grandparents' house contained whole rooms that my parents' house did

④ —a pantry, with a big black grand piano, and ⑤ The rooms were furnished not (pantry, a parlor, a den where Grandpa kept his loot). The furniture and things

with musty deer heads, hand-painted candlesticks, and velvet drapes.

always fascinated me. Best of all was the lake behind the house. Grandpa said

that Evergreen Lake had grown old just like Grandma and him, that the game fish

⑥ were

are gone and only a few bluegills remained. ⑦ Add new section below\*

thought I'd catch anything, but I caught a foot-long goldfish. Grandpa said it was

a goddam carp, <sup>B</sup> but it was a goldfish to me, and I nearly fainted with ecstasy. ⑧

\*Add: But one day he rigged up a pole for me and tossed my line into the water. I sat motionless for several hours, waiting for a miracle. Suddenly I felt a tug on my line. I screeched and yanked upward. By the time Grandpa arrived on the dock, there on the surface lazily moving its fins was the biggest goldfish I had ever seen, nearly a foot long! Grandpa reached down with the net and scooped the huge orange fish out of the water. "Bring down the pail," he shouted. "It's a goddam carp."

### Reasons for Revisions

1. No topic sentence; add one. (topic sentence)
2. Now *grandparents'* repeats the first sentence; use *their*. (pronoun substitution)
3. Add a good descriptive word to give the feeling of the house. (exact language)



4. Expand this; add more details. (details, exact language)
5. More details and examples needed for support! Try to capture the “exotic” feeling of the house. (details, exact language)
6. Verb shifts to present tense; use past tense consistently. (consistent tense)
7. This section is weak. Tell the story of the goldfish; try to create the sense of adventure this had for me as a kid. Quote Grandpa? (details, exact language, direct quotation)
8. Revised paragraph is getting long. Consider breaking into two paragraphs, one on the house and one on the lake.

### Revised Draft

Visiting my grandparents at Evergreen Lake was always an exotic adventure. Their cavernous house contained whole rooms that my parents’ house did not—a pantry, a parlor with a big black grand piano, and a den where Grandpa kept his loot. The rooms were furnished with musty deer heads, hand-painted candlesticks, and velvet drapes.

Best of all was the lake behind the house. Grandpa said that Evergreen Lake had grown old just like Grandma and him, that the game fish were gone and only a few bluegills remained. But one day he rigged up a pole for me and tossed my line into the water. I sat motionless for several hours, waiting for a miracle. Suddenly I felt a tug on my line. I screeched and yanked upward. By the time Grandpa arrived on the dock, there on the surface lazily moving its fins was the biggest goldfish I had ever seen, nearly a foot long! Grandpa reached down with the net and scooped the huge orange fish out of the water. “Bring down the pail,” he shouted. “It’s a goddam carp.” But it was a goldfish to me, and I nearly fainted with ecstasy.

### PRACTICE

Because revising, like writing, is a personal process, the best practice is to revise your own paragraphs and essays. Nevertheless, here is a first draft that needs revising.

Revise it *as if you had written it*. Mark your revisions on the first draft, using and building on the good parts, crossing out unnecessary words, rewriting unclear or awkward sentences, adding details, and perhaps reordering parts. Then, recopy your final draft on the lines. Especially, ask yourself these questions:

Are my verb tenses and pronouns consistent?

Have I used parallel structure?

Have I varied the length and type of my sentences?

Is my language exact, concise, and fresh?

### First Draft

#### *Breaking the Yo-Yo Syndrome*

For years, I was a yo-yo dieter. I bounced from fad diets to eating binges when I ate a lot. This leaves you tired and with depression. Along the way, though, I learned a few things. As a result, I personally will never go on a diet again for the rest of my life.

First of all, diets are unhealthy. Some of the low carbohydrate diets are high in fat. Accumulating fat through meat, eggs, and the eating of cheese can raise blood levels of cholesterol and led to artery and heart disease. Other diets are too high in protein and can cause kidney ailments, and other things can go wrong with your body, too. Most diets also leave you deficient in essential vitamins and minerals that are necessary to health, such as calcium and iron.

In addition, diets are short-term. I lose about ten pounds. I wind up gaining more weight than I originally lost. I also get sick and tired of the restricted diet. On one diet, I ate cabbage soup for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. You are allowed to eat some fruit on day one, some vegetables on day two, and so on, but mostly you are supposed to eat cabbage soup. After a week, I never want to see a bowl of cabbage soup again. Because the diet was nutritionally unbalanced, I ended up craving bread, meat, and all the other foods I am not supposed to eat. Moreover, in the short-term, all one loses is water. You cannot lose body fat unless you reduce regularly and at a steady rate over a long period of time.

The last diet I try was a fat-free diet. On this diet I actually gained weight while dieting. I am surprised to discover that you can gain weight on a fat-free diet snacking on fat-free cookies, ice cream, and cheese and crackers. I also learn that the body needs fat—in particular, the unsaturated fat in foods like olive oil, nuts, avocados, and salad dressings. If a dieter takes in too little fat, you are constantly hungry. Furthermore, the body thinks it is starving, so it makes every effort to try to conserve fat, which makes it much harder for one to lose weight.

In place of fad diets, I now follow a long-range plan. It is sensible and improved my health. I eat three well-balanced meals, exercise daily, and am meeting regularly with my support group for weight control. I am much happier and don't weigh as much than I used to be.





# Writers' Workshop

## Examine the Bright (or Dark) Side of Family Life

Revising is the key to all good writing—taking the time to sit down, reread, and rethink what you have written. In this unit, you have practiced revising for consistent verb tense, consistent person, parallelism, sentence variety, and language awareness.

In your group or class, read this student's essay, aloud if possible. Underline the parts that strike you as especially effective, and put a check by anything that might need revising.

### Family Secrets: Don't You Go Talking

(1) Most families have secrets, but in some families, the secrets become too important. They shape the way people think about themselves and his or her relatives. What people are not supposed to talk about can seem more real than official family history. This was true in my family. Yet when I think about some of our secrets now, they don't seem much like secrets anymore.

(2) Psychologists say that "most secrets arise out of shame." The fact that my father drank excessively brought about a certain family shame. Quiet comments were made protesting his behavior, but no one dared discuss his drinking freely. In fact, I can remember "that look" my mother would give me, meaning "Don't you go talking about nothing that goes on in this house." I couldn't understand that. It was not as if he drank at home where no one but the family could see the staggering or hear the loud profanities. Yet because he was a member of the family, we were expected to turn a blind side.

(3) Secrets help create family history, and since history is said to repeat itself, I feel it safe to say that behavior kept hidden in family secrets may be hereditary. For instance, I have heard talk among family members of an aunt who loved to gamble. As the story goes, Aunt Sally loved to gamble so much that in her ninth month of pregnancy she left her home in California and traveled to Las Vegas by bus. She wanted to play the slot machines. Aunt Sally went into labor. She refused to stop gambling. The contractions were six minutes apart. She was heavily involved in a poker game. Still she refused to leave. The labor pains were four minutes apart. Aunt Sally continued to play. She was enjoying a winning streak. She intended to see it out.

(4) Four hours and \$63,000 later, Aunt Sally gives birth to a baby boy. He weighs eight pounds, eight ounces. As luck would have it, her winning hand holds a pair of eights. Aunt Sally's left palm supposedly grips one particular chip so tightly during each contraction that the imprint drew blood. Today that baby born in Vegas is said to be a gambler