

Foreword

This isn't just another book about teaching writing. It's a book about teaching *revision*: the very heart and soul of good writing. The sine qua non. Or to put it another way, until we teach revision, we're not really teaching writing at all. In *Revision Strategies*, authors Jolene Borgese, Dick Heyler, and Stephanie Romano take us on a virtual tour through the world of revision. They share lessons that will engage students, but more important, allow them to see their writing change right before their eyes. When that happens, students sense—some for the first time—that they truly *are* writers. There's a word for that feeling: success.

In the thousands of writing workshops I've conducted, the question I've most often asked teachers is this: *What is the most challenging part of writing to teach?* Almost to a teacher they say revision, revision . . . *revision*. And no wonder, for revision is an art. Consider *why* writers revise: to clarify meaning, sharpen voice, or touch a reader's heart. Such changes demand insight and strategy—and these are not simple things to teach.

That's precisely where this book comes in. It's a collection of strategies, yes—but strategies designed to build understanding. Anyone can toss together a random collection of lessons. But lessons that take writers deep inside their own writing and help them understand how revision works are rare. That's what makes this carefully selected collection so special; it pays homage to the true nature of revision by giving young writers the skills and guidance they need to see their work with new eyes—more as an editor might see it.

You can bet that any genuinely thoughtful book on revision captures my attention. After all, I've been working with 6-Trait writing since the mid-1980s, way back when Beaverton's extraordinary teacher team developed the first 6-Trait model. Though our original focus was on writing assessment, it became apparent almost overnight that the real destiny of the 6-Traits was to influence *revision*. Trait-based instruction lays the groundwork for revision by showing writers what makes their writing work—or stands in the way. Now, with a fresh perspective, *Revision Strategies* links lessons in revision directly and clearly to *specific* traits. And those links make the underlying purpose behind every lesson clear: to help students revise for clarity, fluency, voice, detail, wording, idea development—and much more.

As you page through this book, here are just a few of the things you will notice—and love: First, these lessons make revision *fun*. This is no small achievement, because as anyone who has ever taught writing will tell you, many students dread revision. It just feels so . . . heavy, tedious, endless, and dull. Like relocating pyramids. As these authors remind us, to teach revision well we need to lighten up. We need to remind students that revision begins with sharing your opinion, your personal vision of which words sound right and which don't. Try it. Hand students colored pencils and turn them loose on a rough draft—and watch a classroom spring to life as formerly passive students morph into experts, passionate about writing, eager to transform a voiceless piece into something that could sway minds or capture hearts. When students feel that kind of power, revision is no longer a mindless chore; it's gamesmanship, choreography, design—and the options are *exciting*.

You'll also notice a strong emphasis on literature—on reading to become a writer. I applaud this with my whole being. Many years ago, I heard Don Graves (to whom this book is dedicated) say, "Writing is the making of reading." Think about this. Each time we write, we need to picture someone reading what we've written, and ask, *Will this make sense to that reader? Will he or she hear my voice?* And if the answer to either question is *no*, we have to try again—and again. Until it works. As writers, we don't *want* to give up once we believe someone is actually *listening*. We want to get the phrasing and the cadence just right—so we can connect with that someone waiting on the other side of our words. Good literature shows us how to do this; it's filled with examples of enticing leads, powerful voice, strong verbs, just right endings, and more. Throughout this book, well-loved authors like Jerry Spinelli and Gordon Korman share delightful bits of wisdom about their own writing processes. And in addition, the authors recommend numerous books to which we can turn when we want to show students how to develop ideas or organize details or write to persuade.

Though every lesson is a little different, you'll find the fabric of writing process and workshop woven all through this text. Leaf through the book to rediscover the impact of modeling, sharing aloud, conferring, working with peers, and interacting with text—searching out sensory details, finding that spot where an image or example would open things up for readers, highlighting verbs that work or clichés that don't. *Every lesson* packs a revision punch. And every lesson is designed to fit into the viable, fluid context of writers working with writers—because that's how coaches are made. A number of lessons are genre specific, designed to help students craft stronger examples of memoir, essays, poems, arguments, or other forms. This is particularly important not just because genre is an inherent component of both the Common Core Standards and the NCTE bedrock beliefs, but because clarity and voice stem from purpose. And genre is all about purpose. Once a writer knows *why* he or she is writing—to entertain, to teach, to convince—generalities dissolve like fog in the sun.

Maya Angelou once observed, "Some critics will write 'Maya Angelou is a natural writer'—which is right after being a natural heart surgeon." I love that. It's a wonderful and humorous reminder that writing is very hard work—for everyone—and make no mistake: Revision can be the hardest part. But revision is also joyful, rewarding, wondrous, freeing—and terribly important. A book like this matters because it teaches us, along with our students, how to do something that is both challenging and constructive. It teaches us to build bridges, writer to reader. Thank you, Jolene, Dick, and Stephanie, for sharing so many lessons that can make us all look and feel like "naturals."

Vicki Spandel

Author

The 9 Rights of Every Writer (2005)

Creating Young Writers, 3rd edition (2012)

Creating Writers, 6th edition (2013)