

Revision Plus Lesson 2

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LESSON 2: REVISING AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Student writers are often highly motivated to write scenes and stories that connect with their own lives, especially when encouraged to focus on positive experiences. With accompanying photos or other mementos, the finished pieces can be treasures to share and to save. This lesson offers your students an opportunity to consider their draft autobiographies and, using *Revision Plus*, make significant corrections and changes.

Focusing Revision Strategies

From each of the five sets of task cards, select the **ten** cards discussed below. If any of the revision tasks are unfamiliar to your students, take time to introduce the concepts in a mini-lesson or a series of mini-lessons. You may decide to use one or a few of these cards as your students revise, rather than work with all ten at once. This will depend upon the skills of your students and the time you have in one class period to devote to revision.

Choice

Find a simple descriptive word.

Replace that word with a more effective one found in a thesaurus.

Perhaps when one is writing about one's own life experiences, there can be a tendency to see the events as ordinary or simple. The descriptive language, then, may be made more interesting for the reader if the writer makes more effective choices, perhaps using a thesaurus or the "synonyms" option on a computer.

Choice

Read aloud your first sentence and your last sentence.

Decide whether these are the best choices for beginning and ending.

As with all writing, the beginning is very important in terms of engaging a reader and making the direction of the writing clear. Students may want a playful tone or a more serious one, and this will be created through the word choices and through sentence structures. The final sentence of the autobiography must satisfy the reader by offering a closing that clearly and effectively completes the action and underscores or draws a conclusion to the main idea.

Correctness

Find a place to use an exclamation mark correctly.

Enthusiasm about people and events in one's personal life may spill over into too many exclamation marks. This task card asks students

to consider the correct use of exclamation marks and will encourage them to delete unnecessary ones as well as insert the enthusiasm only when it is effective.

Correctness

Have you decided to write in the past, present, or future tense?

Check to be sure you did not change from one tense

to another without a clear reason.

Autobiography may be made more interesting when writers shift the tense from past to present and back again, remembering events and reflecting on them. A caution, therefore, is needed: make sure the verb tenses are appropriate to the "time" of the writing. As an added guide to their readers, many writers also leave gaps between scenes that take place at different times to further indicate the shift.

Ideas

Find a place where an anecdote would help to explain something

to your reader. Write the anecdote.

Anecdote is at the heart of autobiography. This is where the writing comes to life with setting, dialogue, and description. Depending on the length of the autobiography, the student may include more than one anecdote. Remind your students that the theme of anecdote must have special significance to the main idea of the autobiography.

Ideas

Check your facts. Is time logical: time of day, time of year, etc.?

Make changes where needed.

This revision task reminds students that events as they recall them may not be entirely accurate. A brief interview with friends and/or family may help to clarify the information included in the autobiography. Also, students need to focus on details to make sure everything makes sense: If it's a snowy winter day, what are people wearing?

Organization

Read your dialogue out loud to hear if you can easily keep track of who is speaking. Make changes where needed.

Anecdotes in autobiography usually include dialogue. All the conventions of writing conversation, therefore, must be followed. Yet, sometimes it can be tedious when writers always identify the speakers with such indicators as "he said" or "she replied." Encourage students to use variety, including not identifying the speaker at all. As they read their dialogue aloud, students will hear the word and

sentence structure choices of the people speaking and recognize that these qualities help to identify the speakers. Also, they will note that when each new person speaks, the words begin on a new line.

Organization

Number your paragraphs so they will be in the best order when you write your next draft.

Upon completion of a first draft, students can more easily see the best order of ideas in the whole piece. Ideas that first occur to a writer may not be the strongest ones to begin the autobiography. Sometimes “best order” is defined by logic while at other times it is defined by the pace and tone the writer has chosen.

Voice

*Why is the topic you've chosen important to you?
Write yourself a brief note to explain your answer.*

This is an opportunity for students to reflect on purpose in their writing. A deeper understanding of the significance of a specific personal life experience will help the writer do a better job of writing the autobiography. In fact, parts of this note may be used directly in the next draft of the writing, especially in the introduction or conclusion.

Voice

*Find a place where your own writer's voice is very clear.
Give yourself a check mark.*

The audience for student autobiography is often family and friends. Therefore, the tone of the writing is less formal and the individual writer's voice reflects this tone. It will encourage students to have more confidence in themselves as writers when they recognize the connections between their own choices and individual writer's voice. For those having difficulty with this concept, you might highlight one area of their draft writing where you recognize individual writer's voice.

Rethinking and Rewriting

When you are confident that your students are familiar with the tasks you have selected, invite them to form five groups. Give each group the cards you have selected. It will be more productive if the members of each group work together, one task card at a time. Those who do not need to make changes suggested on the task cards will be able to help by advising others and perhaps showing strong examples from

their autobiographies. You will be free to circulate from group to group, listening to the conversations and noticing when individuals need a bit more support from you.

Sharing “Before and After”

Whenever possible, encourage your students to share with each other some of the changes they make in their draft autobiographies. This may be achieved by inviting your students to work together in small groups or by calling upon individuals to share with the whole class. It will be helpful for those who may be struggling with the revision concepts to see and/or hear the shared examples. You might want to create a classroom display of “before and after” examples generated by the students.

Reflecting on Learning

Finally, suggest that students write notes to themselves, perhaps in a writer's notebook, explaining one strength in their own autobiographies and one reminder for improvement in the future. These notes can be useful as you confer with students and assess their skill development.