

Revision Plus Lesson 3

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LESSON 3: REVISING FICTION

Writing short fiction, scenes from novels, or even full-length novels demands a lot from students (from any writers!). Readers need to be hooked by intriguing beginnings; characters must be developed, even minor characters, so they are not cardboard cut-outs on the page; plots must twist and turn and finally come to a logical and satisfying outcome. Writers need to get inside the characters and their stories and stay there until the fiction is complete. This lesson offers your students an opportunity to consider their draft fiction and, using *Revision Plus*, make significant corrections and changes.

Focusing Revision Strategies

From each of the five sets of task cards, select the **twelve** 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 twelve 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.

In the excitement of getting the story on the page, students may find themselves choosing very simple words—the first ones that come to mind. At the revision stage, descriptive language may be made more interesting if the writer makes more effective choices using a thesaurus or the “synonyms” option on a computer.

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.

In the early draft stages, it is easy to slip from one verb tense to another without purpose (perhaps without thinking). This revision task gives students an opportunity to make sure verb tense errors are corrected. As they consider this task, encourage your students to think about which verb tense (or tenses) will work best for their particular stories. The immediate present tense may serve best in an action story, for example, whereas the reflective past tense may be needed in a story where a character remembers back to a time when something significant had happened.

Correctness

Find a word that you think might be spelled incorrectly.

Check the spelling in a dictionary.

Many of your students will be using word processors with a spell-check option. For this revision task, a spell-check tool can be considered a dictionary. Yet, spell-check is not always reliable and students must be reminded of this. Even though it may seem inconvenient to stop and check a word or meaning in a dictionary, it is part of any writer’s habit. (Of course, in that first rush of getting all the ideas on the page, writers don’t need to be as concerned about spelling or any other element of correctness.)

Decide your own revision task.

This task card gives your students an opportunity to think of very specific details of their own stories and make changes that will strengthen the writing. Encourage individuals to explain (either verbally or in writing) their reasons for these personal revision decisions—it will reinforce what they already know and will give you a clearer understanding of their writing development.

Ideas

Find a place where description is missing.

Add more details to make your “picture” clearer.

Writers imagine whole scenes with complex background details and with characters moving about and speaking. It would be impossible (and not actually recommended as interesting reading) to recreate in words every fine point of those scenes and characters. Yet, what tends to happen is that writers leave out too much detail. They see everything and mistakenly believe that their readers can too.

Ideas

Rewrite your introduction to make it more interesting.

The first sentence or paragraph written is not always the best place to begin fiction. It was a starting point for the writer. However, having developed the characters and the story and having completed the piece, the writer now knows the fiction more deeply. With this new understanding, a writer may be ready to create a stronger beginning.

Ideas

Find a place where you have written clear and interesting description.

Give yourself a check mark.

This task card provides an opportunity for students to recognize where

they have been successful. Encourage those who do not find clear and interesting description to revise by adding some description, and then give themselves a check mark.

Organization

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

Writing dialogue is one of the most difficult aspects of creating fiction. Each character's voice must be distinct, with its own specific word choices and sentence structures. Also, the various conventions of writing conversation must be followed. Sometimes it can be tedious reading if writers continuously identify the speakers with such indicators as "he said" or "she replied." Encourage students to use variety, including not identifying the speaker at all.

Organization

Think about paragraphing. Have you always started a new paragraph in the most logical place? Make changes where needed.

The common distinction between one paragraph and another is that each has its own main idea. Yet writers may see a blending of ideas and therefore find it difficult to recognize the "most logical place" to create a new paragraph. Sometimes it may be helpful to suggest that, after rereading five or six sentences, writers consider whether a new idea has been introduced.

Voice

Read your dialogue out loud to hear whether each character has a clear and distinct voice. Make changes where needed.

This revision task not about organizing dialogue into clear and separate paragraphs. It is about the sound of the characters' voices: What ideas are they talking about? What word choices are they making? What sentence structures are part of their normal speaking patterns? By reading aloud, students will hear the distinct differences between the characters. If they do not hear such distinctions, revisions are needed.

Voice

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

As students develop their fiction, they can begin to see ways in which their choices (themes, words, sentence structures, etc.) help to create individual writer's voice. Encourage students to recognize the connections between their choices and 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.

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 and to gain a deeper understanding of personal connections that may be inspiring them to write. The story can become more meaningful and its directions can be seen more clearly when the writer has considered the relationship between topic choice and 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 fiction. 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 students to share with each other some of the changes they make in their draft writing. This may be achieved by inviting students to work together in small groups or by calling upon individuals to share with the whole class. It will be helpful or 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 fiction and one reminder for improvement in the future. These notes can be useful as you confer with students and assess their skill development.