



Module 2 Exercise – Different types of revisions

In this exercise, the goal is to determine the type of revision you're facing, and determine if you need to take a slightly different approach. Below is a check list for you to follow:

Different types of revisions

- Revising your own:** This is a typical first-draft revision, where no one by you has seen the manuscript. You either want to work out all the bugs before you show anyone else, or you want to make it complete before seeking feedback.
- Revising from feedback:** This is a draft that's been through the critique stage and has feedback to help guide your revision.
- Revising overly revised manuscripts:** The more troublesome manuscripts are those that you've revised over and over. You've changed so much you often forget what story you were trying to write in the first place.
- Revising from multiple drafts:** If you've been revising for a while, you might have several drafts that explore different directions. Problem is, you're now faced with several drafts that all contain scenes and ideas you like, and you have no clue how to merge them all into one draft.
- Revising half-finished manuscripts:** These manuscripts have stalled, often somewhere in the middle of the book. They require more effort because they're often inherently flawed and until you fix that flaw you can't get the book to work.





Revising on you own

One of the toughest aspects of writing is the ability to look at your work without an emotional attachment to it. To get the most from a revision, you have to look at your work as if you didn't write it.

- **Give yourself the freedom to stink:** The first brain dump can be messy, and the revision is how you clean up the mess. As you go through your manuscript, remember you're not finding mistakes, you're finding places to improve the manuscript.
- **Approach it as if you're doing a critique for a friend:** It can help to look at your manuscript and pretend it was written by a friend. What advice would you give that friend about this story? Be a good friend and be ruthless. The tougher you are, the better the manuscript will be.
- **Don't worry about the time it takes to revise:** Unless you're on a deadline, worrying about when you'll get a revision done can be stressful and sap your creativity and energy. You want to get your book done as quickly as possible so you can send it out, but rushing the work never result in the best work, and this can hurt you and your book in the long run.
- **Receiving feedback:** It's important to remember that you are always in control of your work. You can say no to changes – whoever they come from. You decide how you want to handle feedback, and you might find that you can find ways to satisfy the critiquers and so something you never expected with the book.
- **First look at a critique:** A good first step is to simply read them with no expectations. Make no judgments here. If anything pops up that seems totally out of left field then let it slide on by. Once you have read everything, let it sit for a few days.





- **Dealing with feedback from critique:** When you get a critique it can be easy (and tempting) to ignore what you don't like and accept only the comments that praise the manuscript. But you asked, so treat any feedback with the respect it deserves. It was given to help you discern where any problems lie in your manuscript, and to give you opportunities to make the work even better.

Here are some things to consider:

- Take every comment seriously
- If you agree with a comment, make the change
- If you don't agree with a comment, don't make the change
- If you're unsure about a comment, think about what the critique is trying to point out and why
- If you trust the critique had that issue, but know in your heart the scene or detail is right
- If it's a grammar or punctuation rule and you're not sure if the comment is right, look it up
- If it's a clarity issue, fix it, even if you think it's clear

Most importantly, so whatever serves the story best!

- **Don't try to do it all:** As tough as revising can be, the hard part is reviewing your critiques and not being sure what to do with all that advice. It's not uncommon to want to do everything everyone says, but listening too hard can cause problems. Sometimes it's better to hear what they're saying and identify the problem that made them say it in the first place.

Are you ignoring advice that can help you?

Every writer gets at least one rough critique, and it's only natural to ignore words that hurt or sap your confidence. The danger comes when you consistently ignore the very advice that can help you just because it hurts or you don't like it. If you have been revising a few books and don't





think you're getting any better, step back, look at the situation objectively and ask yourself the following:

- Are you getting the same advice from multiple sources?
- Is the amount or quality of feedback you're getting declining?
- Do you feel as if you ought to do it but you're blowing it off because "that's what editors are for"?

Revising overly revised manuscripts (The Frankendraft)

A Frankendraft differs from a draft you know needs heavy revising. It's been cut and stitched together so many times the scenes no longer work together, and the story is either so deeply buried or so watered down that it doesn't make a whole lot of sense anymore.

Say Goodbye

Accept that the Frankendraft is dead and put the manuscript in a drawer. This mess is created by revising it over and over, and it's time to start fresh. Forget the text you already wrote and focus on the story you wanted to tell. Rewrite it from scratch in a clean file. No more editing. No more trying to make this manuscript work. Treat it as if it were a brand new idea and run from there.





Trim the Fat

Decide what's needed in the story and what's not. What's the single most important goal in the plot? That's your core conflict.

I strongly recommend doing an outline here. It will help see if your plot is working and if you have all the right pieces to write a solid book without writing the actual book. If there are any glaring holes or problems, they will show up here.

Kill Some Characters

Has as this will be, eliminating characters will go a long way toward stripping out what's unnecessary. Who is the single most important character in the story (that's your protagonist)? Who is their antagonist? Now get rid of everyone else (don't panic, you'll add some back!).

Make a list of all the other characters. Go through the list and ask if the two critical characters absolutely totally need that person to resolve the story goal. It's okay to have a 'maybe' list here, as you'll need some minor characters down the road.

Go Five For Five

What are the five critical events that have to happen to resolve the core conflict? Who are the five (or fewer) critical characters necessary to achieve those goals?

Take those five plot events and spread them out over the course of the book. Which one is the best starting place? One of the critical events in your story should be the inciting event. If it's not, go back to step 4 and try again. Which one is the ending? You should have figured out this event from step 2.

Now of the remaining three events, which one is the best midpoint reversal event? It should be large enough to sustain your middle, and





interesting enough to keep readers guessing. (A midpoint reversal is something that happens in the middle of the novel to surprise readers or change how the story unfolds. It also gives you something to plot toward from the beginning then deal with in a way that gets you to the ending).

Finally, take each of the two remaining events and put one on either side of the midpoint. These might make good first and second act endings.

Dealing with multiple drafts during revision

Some manuscripts go through several drafts before you find the best way to tell your story. Problem is you can end up with multiple drafts containing good writing in each one. The goal here is to find the most effective way to manage multiple drafts during a revision.

- Rethink your darlings:** In multiple drafts, you'll likely have favourite moments you want to include, and you'll probably work hard to get them to fit in. But just because it's a great scene doesn't mean it belongs in the final story or plot.

Ask yourself the following:

Does it advance the core conflict?

Does it offer new and relevant information?





- Beware of revision smudge:** Revision smudge is those bits and pieces left behind that reference something no longer in the story.

Ask yourself the following:

Are there any leftover names or details that don't belong?

Is anything referenced that is no longer there, or has changed?

Are there extra characters in a scene who aren't anywhere else in the story?

Is the information revealed new, or has it been added elsewhere?

- Check for repeated information:** Repeated description and backstory often cause trouble when merging multiple drafts. To help fix out-of-order or repeated details, search for each character's name and verify where you revealed it first, then check if it was also mentioned any other place. This can be time consuming, but by the end, you'll know exactly where you wrote about a character.
- Revise chronologically:** Revising chronologically also helps see the story as it unfolds, since you can easily flip back and double check details. You might even make an easy to check list of details you changed that need to be edited overall.

