

Introduction

For many writers, the revision process is always the most anxiety-producing part of the writing process. To stare into the face of comments and a red ink sea on your edited writing is to stare into the face of failure and criticism. The revision process, however, is a critical and very necessary part of any writing project. While many authors are content to edit their work by themselves, in a traditional publishing market, several editors will evaluate their work, and for good reason. Having feedback from a reader's perspective is crucial in productive revision. Writers also generally miss their own mistakes because they have looked at the work for so long that the error is simply overlooked. This report explores how writers can benefit from utilizing the concept of a writing conference during revision and how writing coaches and editors can accomplish this type of editing by implementing the revision philosophy proposed by Nancy Sommers.

Routes To Publishing

There are generally three types of publishing houses working in the market in our day. First, there are traditional publishing houses where writers submit their work independently or through an agent and are offered a contract. The publishing house takes care of all legal aspects, making the final product, marketing, and distribution. Another type of publishing house in the market is a subsidy house. These houses provide services that writers must pay for up-front for the house to produce and publish the book. The author is generally responsible for the distribution and sales of the work (Jenkins, 2015). Many writers find subsidy houses to be a scam overall, with very little offered in the way of editing. Mostly, the writing is put into a generic editing format, hopefully given an ISBN, and then sold to the writer. More recently, self-publishing has become very popular. Self-publishing is relatively easy to accomplish. Platforms

like Amazon's Create Space is fairly easy to manipulate and generally just requires a business license that is easy to obtain. You don't need to purchase ISBNs to publish, as Amazon will provide generic codes called ASINs. The writer is in charge of setting up the format of the book as well as all the marketing and local distribution of the book. Local distribution can be difficult without an ISBN, but the price spent on purchasing ISBNs is similar to subsidiary publishing or even cheaper, depending on how many numbers are purchased.

Writing Conferences

Writing conferences are an opportunity to allow a teacher, writing coach, or editor to interact with a writer with the goal of improving a piece of writing. Building this relationship between a writer and an editor/coach is a crucial element to the success of a writer's work in the market. Writing coaches or editors serve in the role of teacher to the writer. For the scope of this report, we'll refer to writing coaches and editors as coaches, as that term more readily identifies with the process of writing conferences.

The atmosphere of a writing conference provides a safe and more productive space to work on a piece of writing (Shvidko, 2018). When coaches mark up papers with corrections and comments, the writer of the piece can be easily confused over the coach's line of reasoning and then become emotional over what may seem like discouraging remarks. Instead of writers becoming discouraged or hostile about comments, the writing conference can allow the coach to open up a dialogue about the work, allowing the interaction to strengthen the work. The coach can help the writer understand the reader's perspective of their work in this way in this format as well.

One important aspect of the relationship between the writer and the coach is that the writer is allowed more autonomy in the writing process by becoming the expert on their work and responding to comments or requested changes from the coach. In a study by May (2015), teachers were seen as the authority, while the student writer had autonomy of the piece as its creator. Coaches can act as authorities as they have expert knowledge in the field of writing, which the writer can look up to, yet the coach must be responsive to the writer as the creator of a unique piece of writing. Mays found that the teacher could model reader behavior for the writer so the writer could take the lead in the revision of the piece without having the possible negative reactions to misunderstood markings that do not value their opinion. Since the writer also feels more in control of their piece during a writing conference, they are able to think critically about the piece to strengthen the revision. Likewise, the coach, modeling the view of the reader, helps the writer to see their strengths and weaknesses so the writer is more apt to notice this on their own in the future.

By helping the writer expand on the knowledge of their subject, the coach can draw out a deeper and more meaningful piece of writing than the original. Sometimes, writers do not give thorough details in their work as they forget the reader may not have access to the information the writer does. This can be factual information, or it may be imagery information the writer sees in their head but has failed to express in their writing. Often, writers believe the piece to be more detailed and logical when, in fact, the writing is disjointed or makes no sense to the reader because they are unable to connect all the dots. By working in a relationship in a writing conference, the coach can help draw the missing information and details out of a writer, so the piece can gain clarity (Shvidka, 2018). In turn, this revision process becomes more akin to a

discussion and brainstorming session to dig deeper into the writing, creating an overall positive experience that is difficult to attain through written comments only.

One of the greatest accomplishments of the writing conference is that the format can be very positive and motivational for the writer. When a professional, such as a teacher, coach, or editor, has a meeting with a student writer where the writer is accepted and made to feel they are an authority on their work, it motivates the writer through a sense of belonging to the professional field. According to Hale (2017), this motivates students to approach difficulties in their writing as challenges that can be overcome, which allows them to learn more in their field. Such a mindset means writers are more cognizant of and willing to engage in the revision process because they feel more connected to a group of professionals, so they carry a responsibility to do their best work in representing the field. Writing conferences create this atmosphere because the coach is not the dominant voice since the writer will be taking the lead in expanding on their work. This autonomy welcomes the writer into the professional atmosphere where they feel they have been accepted even though they are still learning.

Sommer's Revision Philosophy

Nancy Sommers offers a revision philosophy that lends itself to the writing conference. She has become an authority in composition and revision. Beginning her career at the University of Oklahoma directing the writing program, Sommers had a brief stint at Rutgers before becoming the Director of Harvard's Expository Writing Program, which she has been running for over twenty years (Leake & Masiel, 2014). Her work in the area of revision focuses on how to help teachers guide students through the revision process. She has written numerous articles and a book, produced three films, and been featured in anthologies, but perhaps her most ambitious project was to follow the writing development of undergraduate students at Harvard

through the entirety of their four years as college students. She studied how the comments and revision process experienced by students had developed them as writers. Her philosophy and study of revision has centered on going beyond word-level changes to evaluating content and growth in the writer in critical thinking. Her approach to revision lends itself to the writing conference style and serves to assist writers in their professional growth.

The biggest concept Sommers talks about that can benefit the revision process is helping writers focus on sentence-level revising. In a study between student writers and professional writers, Sommers found that student writers focus on word-level changes, whereas professional writers focus more on sentence-level changes during revision (Sommers, 1980). In other words, students, or inexperienced writers, don't focus on the content of their writing and how it is structured when making changes to their work. Even if they feel there are larger changes that could be made to their work, they feel they have already said what they are going to say and, therefore, just need to change the way in which it was said rather than further develop their ideas. Unskilled writers tend to change words or rephrase a sentence rather than address larger issues in structure, ordering, and logic. However, skilled writers look at the way their work is laid out, how they can further develop their ideas and evidence used to support them, and if they can improve the way they have expressed their ideas.

In perhaps Sommers' most famous article, "Responding to Student Writing", Sommers talks about how comments and revision marks can both be confusing and misleading to writers (Sommers, 1982). During the revision process, unskilled writers do not focus on the needed sentence-level changes, so if coaches point out word-level changes on rough drafts, writers will key into those and believe that if they correct them, they have fixed the writing. Therefore, it is unfruitful when coaches spend time correcting grammar and word choice when the sentences are

not in their final state. It is better for coaches to spend their time addressing sentence-level changes through comments that engage the writer in critical thinking about how to rework their writing to make it stronger.

The godly wife desires the best for their family, others and herself. She make the most of wh she does have. A godly woman makes sure she is getting good deals on things she buys so she isn't losing money. In Biblical days women used to have to makeclothes for her family and now it might be more about making sure to buy sensible clothing that will last longer.
When my husband was diagnosed with diabetes, we had to start watching our sugar content. This meant I had to check the labels for sugar usage when I was shopping. To ensure his health I tried to buy the best we could afford while also being thrifty. —A personal example of a godly woman shopping around for the best is when I go grocery shopping for my husband I have to check the sugar content since he has diabetes and get the best buy on what I buy for him.
"Lord, help me today to shop around for the best in everything."

Figure 1: An Excerpt from an editing project displays an edit focused on word-level changes.

In Figure 1, the edit focused on word-level changes. The intention had been to show how the structure of writing needed to change to enhance the word choice, support the arguments, and pace the writing to hold the reader's attention. However, writers could see these changes as word-level changes and believe they just need to fix the word choice and grammar to have successfully revised the piece. In other words, no further ideas were developed, very few clarifying details were added, and nothing was really expanded in the writing.

A good woman is a treasure. She prays daily and asks for the following of the Lord. A good woman was made in God's image. God meant for the woman to be valued.

An example of this is women in the Bible had a lot of rights like holding property, having a say in marriage and they even served as judges. (Maybe you can find the passage that allowed one of the tribes daughters to have land when they entered the promised land. Deborah, a judge might be a good example to list also. Just give it some detail. Be sure to give the scripture references)

Figure 2: An excerpt from an editing project that is geared toward sentence-level revision.

Figure 2, above, shows how an open-ended question can help a writer to focus more on sentence-level changes and begin to think critically about the work they are doing. It is less confusing to a writer if a coach makes their notes in comments, as this helps them express their authority as the creator of the work. By asking open-ended questions, the writer can begin to grapple with the evidence to support their work and how they can improve their structure by adding this support to their ideas. Figure 2 represents an approach consistent with Sommer's ideas that making specific comments to a writer is more helpful overall and puts the writer in the right frame of thought in revising their work. The word order of the writing doesn't matter as much because it will all ultimately change as the writer revises their evidence support and how they explain their ideas to the audience.

This kind of coaching is what is helpful to address in the writing conference with the writer. The coach will have made notes on the rough draft and can ask the writer to come up with more detailed evidence that supports the idea the writer has brought up. In this example, the coach may ask the writer what stories come to mind when they think about biblical women having rights. The coach may even play devil's advocate by addressing the views of some would-be readers and say to the author, "A lot of people feel Christianity actually restricts the

woman in a marriage because they are to be submissive and that they do not have rights. What examples could you give to address those concerns that the audience may have?” In this way, the coach’s revision work through preparing comments prior to the conference can lead them to a dialogue with the writer. This helps the writer by allowing them to learn skills related to sentence-level revision and offers them more autonomy in the piece.

The reason writers tend to focus on word-level changes during revision is that they focus on the rituals of academy and trying to correct formal errors (Sommers, 1992). We tend to put our efforts into what is familiar. A writer may gravitate towards correcting words and grammar because they know the rules for that, whereas they may be lacking in skills to address sentence-level problems (Sommers, 2006). Coaches can focus on assisting writers with sentence-level successes and errors to help writers become cognizant of the areas they can further develop, and what they may be doing well they can highlight in their work. Focusing on this gives meaning to the work and teaches writers critical thinking skills. In fact, Sommers recommends having writers attach a cover letter addressing the intent and purpose of the paper as well as any challenges or logical problems the writer experienced so the editor can assist in making helpful comments to improve the structure of the piece (Leake & Masiel, 2014).

Writers often know they have a larger problem with the writing matching up to what they envisioned for the piece but have no idea how to go about fixing it. The writing conference can help the coach understand the goal of the writer more clearly by allowing the writer to speak to them about the piece they want to create without having to look at the piece where they may get lost in word-level changes again. The coach can then start to pinpoint ways the writer can improve the draft by talking about large chunks of writing as a whole.

Okay I will adding a prayer at the end of each one

So it looks good other than putting a personal example in it?

😊 awesome! I'm sorry it still needs editing. I know you like devotionals. Try reading through them some and looking at their formats. I got a handful out when I was editing yours last time and counted word lengths and that kind of thing to make sure it was looking like most devotionals. I think without some more depth to it it will look like one of those gift books with just surface level reading when it is published. You are getting there quickly though! You haven't been through many drafts!

Yes! I think going into detail with an example will make it deeper and more beneficial!

Okay I will add a personal example in each of them. If I do that do you think that the length will be okay?

Figure 3: Personal coaching conversation

Figure 3 shows an attempt to help a writer deal directly with the structure of the piece. However, you can see from the response in the chat that the writer is still focused on word-level choices. Instead of trying to improve through the structure of the work, the writer is finding the academic concern: my devotions aren't long enough. The writer focuses on making that correction rather than adding support to the arguments. This stymies the piece and keeps the writer from achieving a devotion that a reader would enjoy. The reader isn't overly aware of the word length but will notice the lack of development of the devotion. Being able to identify these larger problems in the draft using Sommer's revision ideas can help the coach during the writing conference by asking the writer to think of their own experience in reading devotionals and helping the writer to see which of those important elements they listed is lacking in the work. This can put the writer back into making sentence-level changes to their work. The writing conference is better at allowing writers to talk themselves into seeing what is missing from their effort and understanding how the lacking elements affect the piece of writing. Simply trying to list missing elements will likely have writers making the word-level assumption that all they

need to do is lengthen a piece or stick in a poorly written example that doesn't support their ideas in an attempt to appease the coach.

Writers can be overwhelmed by the number of comments on their piece. The coach may be making comments that praise the writing, but writers usually have a negative feeling towards comments. Therefore, it is helpful for coaches to let their writer know their style of commenting prior to revising a paper so writers are not overwhelmed (Leake & Masiel, 2014). Coaches can't or shouldn't try to comment on every aspect of a piece either. Trying to address every aspect instead of patterns tends to overwhelm the writer. The major goal is to make sense of patterns to lead to improvements that can be made in the writing. The coach can find those patterns yet only comment on one area in order to teach the writer the skill so they can find and fix other areas in the piece with the same problems. The coach is the authority who can point out the patterns but shows confidence in the writer to be able to learn the skill they have pointed out and have autonomy in applying that to the rest of their work. The coach can use the comments to give instructions to the writer to teach them a skill and thus help them grow as a writer (Sommers, 2006). In fact, the hands-on comments that coaches make to the papers are often more helpful in teaching a writer than a lecture on a skill. The constructive criticism is a better motivator to a writer than simply hearing praise for their work.

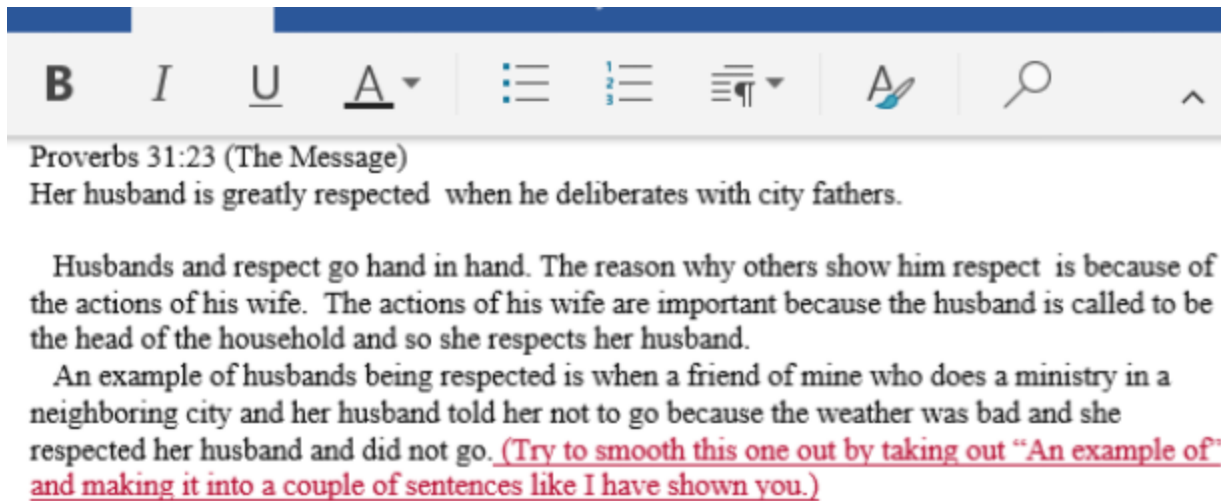


Figure 4: An excerpt showing editing comments that refer to a previous skill and alert the author to use the skill from here on out instead of citing the same mistake on each page.

Figure 4 shows that after pointing out a couple of places in this writing that need sentence-level changes, it is noted that this problem was occurring in all the entries in the devotional. The comment made on the paper encourages the writer to use the information given about smoothing out the stories to make them support the main ideas. The coach trusted that the writer knew their piece of writing and what they could do to express their ideas more fully, as well as that the writer was knowledgeable enough to be able to apply the same skill to every devotional entry without the express comments on every single piece. It also extends that acceptance into the community of professionals by alerting the writer that the coach knows they can grasp the concept and work through applying it to their own work. This can be used in a writing conference by helping the writer to work through one example of the sentence level change and then asking the writer if they feel they can apply the skill to the rest of their work during the revision. It gives them the opportunity to work through one revision hands-on, so they have the knowledge to complete the needed changes in their next revision.

Mlynarczyk (1996) discusses how Sommers' philosophy can assist in helping writers move into a "rhetorical space" from a "content" space. These two "spaces" represent the difference between word and sentence-level editing. Skilled writers can move back and forth between the two spaces, but unskilled writers cannot. They can learn to move between the two spaces with help from the coach through their comments. In the case of the writing conference, it may be beneficial to explain the two levels of corrections to the writer in the process of explaining the way the coach comments. It can help the writer be able to understand the comment and what level or space the coach is working in, so the writer can ground themselves. For example, in Figure 3, the writer may benefit from the coach saying they are not as concerned about simply adding length to the piece but want the writer to develop their ideas so they are more meaningful for the audience, then ask the writer what parts of devotionals have often meant the most to them so they can work that into the structure.

All the processes reviewed in this section can be utilized in written form but would be more efficient in a writing conference. Coaches can follow this form of editing to prepare the writing piece for the conference. Using questions and guiding the writer through strengthening their work can help them move beyond the word-level revising they are used to. Focusing their attention on this aspect will make the writing stronger as the writer and coach work together as partners in the writing process.

Conclusion

Since many coaches are largely teaching writing, it makes sense for coaches to utilize a writing conference where they can teach skills in a hands-on manner. This approach allows the writer to also step into the professional world of writing and be seen as an equal as well as enhance the quality of subsequent drafts that they produce. By utilizing Sommers' revision

techniques and philosophy, coaches can reduce the amount of paperwork on making corrections and focus on making comments that can lead to discussion during the writing conference.

Writers can have more autonomy with their pieces as well as responsibility in learning to overcome challenging writing obstacles. This process will result in a better relationship between the writer and coach and overall lead to a more efficient piece that will sell better in the marketplace. As such, the use of writing conferences and editing that focuses on sentence-level improvements, highlighted in Nancy Sommers' philosophy of revision, appears to be the best practice in achieving writing goals, particularly while assisting writers to create their stories for publication.

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