

On the Merits of Rewriting and Revising

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However seemingly needless and time-consuming revising and rewriting may seem to some writers, it can be as vital to writing as breathing is to life. Yes, revisions are time-consuming; there is no dispute here. But time is best spent improving on what otherwise could—and surely can—be misinterpreted or dismissed as not-worthy of our attention and time. Young writers are prone to thinking that changing, rearranging, or rewriting their manuscript is a sign of weakness or incompetence. Well, they are wrong! William Strunk and E.B. White have made this clear: “*Remember, it is no sign of weakness or defeat that your manuscript ends up in need of major surgery. This is a common occurrence in all writing, and among the best writers.*”¹ The nuance in their statement is this: you’d better be the first surgeon operating on your manuscript. Why is that? Because you are the creator of your work and know your creation more than anybody else. You know what your idea was, and how it was or wasn’t supposed to be developed and interpreted. Armed with this concrete knowledge, you are able to better find the flaws or ambiguities that are in need of attention and repair.

Now, the question is this: in what manner should you approach revising and rewriting your manuscript? The answer is simple: in a merciless manner. Don’t be afraid move or remove words and sentences. Even try to offend yourself by wholesomely deleting elements from your work, or by leaving insulting comments

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¹ Strunk, W., White, E. B. (2000). *The Elements of Style* (4th ed.) Longman

to yourself. Do not fall in love with your writing. Fall in love with what needs to be said; a deserved love of your work, by you and your readers, will ensue. Let revising and rewriting be a form of amusement to you—regard them as addictive entertainments. You will naturally get into the habit of being your best and most ruthless editor. If you are true to yourself, your work will resonate with its audience. If not, at first glance, your audience will see through the curtain of all appealing cosmetics, and discover a fake, incompetent, insecure, and attention-seeking writer whose concern is not her craft or message, but is filling an internal unfillable void—an unpleasant and unfortunate discovery by the readers. Remember, respect your readers, not by writing to their taste, but by writing clearly, unapologetically, and sincerely.

Now, let's delve deeper into the subject of revising and rewriting. You may ask what the difference is. Are these two not parts of a whole idea? There may not be a definitive answer to this question; however, one should like to differentiate these two words, and what they imply in practice. Rewriting, intuitively, can be regarded as a sub-category of revising, meaning that revising a manuscript would—to a degree—naturally involve rewriting. Yet, it is wise, diligent, and intellectually appealing to draw a surgical line between the two. Revising, in the context intended here, entails polishing, retouching, and rearranging material (sentences, paragraphs, visuals, etc.). This is the role of an editor (you being the first one). Be it light copyediting or heavy (comprehensive) editing, followed by proofreading. Rewriting on the other hand, in the context intended here, is more abstract as it comes forward as a relative of re-thinking and re-formulating.

In rewriting, your focus is not entirely on the presentation of your ideas, rather it is on the ideas themselves. By rewriting, you give yourself the opportunity to dissect your ideas and to see if they merit exploration or even inclusion at all. To

rewrite is to re-evaluate the message, and prepare it for a fairer judgement based on its soundness, firmness, and clarity. Write, then rewrite, and be courageous enough to desert your writing if necessary—an eye-opening and humbling experience.

Every now and then, we all need to remind ourselves that noteworthy creations, in whatever form they take, grow out of painstaking work, merciless self-critique, and daunting self-doubt. So, out of respect for yourself and your readers, rewrite, then revise. How many times? As many times as necessary. Don't be afraid to revamp or even abandon your ideas if there is no spark or no breeze of freshness in them. Remember the merits of rewriting and revising:

What is stale and redundant will be gone.