

A NEW LINEAR THEORY OF REVISION

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## PREFACE

This study introduces a new theory of revision which separates the revision process from the composing process. The theory is based on the findings of an in-depth study of advanced student revision practices. These findings were then compared with the findings of recursionist theorists, particularly Nancy Sommers, Lester Faigley, and Stephen Witte, in an effort to find a common thread to tie the revision process together into a teachable unit.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the people who assisted me in this work and during my years at Oklahoma State University. I am especially indebted to my major adviser Dr. William H. Pixton, and to my committee members, Dr. Paul Klemp, and Dr. Ravi Sheorey. A special thanks must also go to Dr. Ed Walkiewicz, Shirley Marney, and Sally Gray.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents who always believed I could do it, even when I did not.

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## CHAPTER I

### A NEW LINEAR THEORY OF REVISION

With the advent of the recursionist theories, the definition of what constitutes revision has become cloudy. Until Nancy Sommers' article "The Need for Theory in Composition Research," writing teachers felt safe in using the term revision to denote any writing process that occurred after the first draft of a written text. The standard procedure in most composition classrooms was for students to produce some type of written text, and then revise what they had written. Sommers claims that "to most composition teachers and researchers, revision is regarded as an isolated noncreative activity, as interesting, perhaps, as an autopsy."<sup>1</sup> In some respects this has been true. As Karen Hodges points out in "A History of Revision: Theory versus Practice," there have been three dominate theories of revision, none of which regards revision as more than a writer's cleaning up and straightening out his text. The classical theory of Aristotle stressed fitting ideas into preset patterns of rhetoric and then cleaning up grammatical or stylistic errors. The neoclassical theory of the eighteenth century also stressed correct grammar and style, along with unity, coherence, and proper usage. The

romantic theory of Wordsworth stressed spontaneity in writing, and revision became the equivalent of proofreading.<sup>2</sup> Even in recent times, revision has often become the stepchild of the writing process. Linear theorists such as William Irmsher in his text Teaching Expository Writing have avoided dealing with revision by restricting it to "clean-up work." Irmsher emphasizes style, which he interprets as largely a grammar and diction problem, and pays scant attention to any other post-writing activities.<sup>3</sup> With this historical background, it is no wonder that teachers often limit revision to correction of errors or stylistic concerns like those presented in texts such as Richard Lanham's Revising Prose, and Joseph Williams' Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace. Clean-up revision is teachable, even to unreceptive students, because it is a concrete activity that can be easily explained and measured by the teacher and that requires very little effort on the part of the student.

As easy as they are to teach, many composition theorists were not satisfied with the linear theories of composition, because of their breakdown of the composition process into isolated stages. When Sommers began to research the composing process, she found that "what was clearly absent was any discussion of a revision or rewriting stage of the process."<sup>4</sup> Many theorists agreed with Linda Flower and John Hayes that the linear theories of composition which divide the writing process into distinct stages "may seriously distort how these activities



work."<sup>5</sup> Gathered from studies of experienced writers, a new theory of composition was presented. It assumed that all writing activity taking place in the course of a writing project was one mental activity composed of several processes which "may occur at any time in the composing process."<sup>6</sup> This theory was based on Flower's and Hayes' study of protocols of experienced writers. Writers were asked to think aloud as they composed. Flower and Hayes believed that, "unlike introspective reports, thinking aloud protocols capture a detailed record of what is going on in the writer's mind during the act of composing itself."<sup>7</sup> From these protocols Flower and Hayes learned that writers make changes in their text even as they compose it.

Thus, in the recursion theory, the term revision must be redefined, as Sommers suggests, to mean "a sequence of changes in a composition--changes which are initiated by cues and occur continually throughout the writing of a work."<sup>8</sup> Donna Grout in her article "A Normal Constant" states that

One might define writing as a process of revision on and off paper. Only proofreading has a clearly allocated moment in the revision process. The rest of the process begins the moment a writer starts to consider a possible topic on which to write. The selection of topic, narrowing of it enough to make a main point and

approachable possibility, perhaps writing enough to discover what the main point and/or audience should be are all parts of a process of re-doing rethinking, reviewing, eliminating, and adding. One could use "revision" as the heading for all such activities.<sup>9</sup>

However, the basis for changing the definition of revision is based on the practices of experienced writers, and these writers think differently than college composition students--especially freshmen. Sommers herself noted that students focused mainly on correcting what they saw as errors while experienced writers focused on conveying meaning. Lester Faigley and Stephen Witte also saw a difference in student revision and experienced writer revision. In their study they used three types of writers: expert adults, advanced students, and inexperienced students. Faigley and Witte studied each writer's text, looked at the types of changes that were made, and classified them as either Meaning Changes (changes in the substance of the text) or Surface Changes (stylistic changes in the text). They found that

advanced students made many Meaning Changes (55.6 per 1000 words) between the first and second drafts. Experts adults . . . made far fewer Surface Changes between drafts (28.7 per 1000 words), devoting their energies instead to reworking the content of their drafts . . . . By

this point inexperienced students had largely quit revising.<sup>10</sup>

Ellen W. Nold in "Revising: Intentions and Conventions" theorizes that the reason experienced writers write well is that they have internalized the conventions of writing that students are still struggling to learn. With these conventions neatly tucked into their subconscious, experienced writers can turn their attention to the intention of their writing--they can focus on what they want to say, as opposed to how they are saying it. Nold uses the terms "revising to fit conventions" and "revising to fit intentions" to denote these two separate revision functions.<sup>11</sup> The experienced writer's focusing ability is also noted by Sommers:

Although the experienced writers describe their revision process as a series of different levels or cycles, it is inaccurate to assume that they have only one objective for each cycle and that each cycle can be defined by a different objective. The same objectives and sub-processes are present in each cycle, but in different proportions.<sup>12</sup>

To ask inexperienced writers to revise based on the revision techniques of experienced writers might be asking them to perform beyond their capabilities. What the recursionists are asking the students to do might be

compared to asking a beginning ballet student to perform the pirouettes of Suzanne Farrell. As William H. Pixton stated in "Reconciling Revision with Reality in Composition Teaching," although revision as a recursive activity describes the writing process of experienced writers,

students trying to imitate these activities may be overwhelmed, for they must commit themselves to the all-inclusive activities for changing their initial writing almost as soon as it occurs.<sup>13</sup>

Thus by redefining revision to stand for any changes made anywhere at any stage of the text, Sommers has made revision impossible to teach because inexperienced writers can rarely focus their attention on what they are saying as well as on how they are saying it.

Another problem with basing the definition of revision on the writing processes of experienced writers is that no two writers compose in the same manner. Faigley and Witte found no single pattern of revision because they "found extreme diversity in the ways expert writers revise."<sup>14</sup> And Mimi Schwartz states in "Revision Profiles: Patterns and Implications" that

in short, even when writers have a repertoire of revision skills, their patterns are not predict-

able. We may know that in general revision is useful, but we as yet have no guidelines for individual success.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, when all the changes made during the composing process, especially in the first draft, are included in the analysis of revision, the findings become meaningless except for the unique writer involved in the study. Most researchers agree that, although experienced writers focus on different objectives at different times during their writing process, there does not seem to be any set order of stages that can be clearly defined. This lack of order leaves the inexperienced student almost without guidance in the area of revision.

Students tend to view revision as clean-up work. Sommers states that the students she studied "did not seem comfortable using the word revision and explained that revision was not a word they used, but a word their teachers used."<sup>16</sup> Faigley and Witte found that, "if inexperienced writers revise during composing, they almost always limit their revision to correcting errors."<sup>17</sup> Part of the student writer's problem is that most high school writing courses emphasize grammatical errors and their correction as the key to good grades. Although this type of instruction is important, it does produce habits and expectations in students that are hard to break. It is a rare university composition teacher that has not heard the line from a

beginning student, "What's wrong with my essay? You haven't marked any grammar errors!" Nold has pointed out that

skilled writers can produce much better writing than unskilled writers not only because they have learned the conventions but because they have strategies for reducing the load on their attention.<sup>18</sup>

Inexperienced writers do not have these strategies and recursive theorists seem reluctant to provide them with any. Although the recursionist theories have some excellent points (such as the idea that revision is an ongoing process), these theories lack practical application. If the recursion theory is to be useful to composition teachers, it must provide guidelines for inexperienced writers. It cannot provide any guidelines for the improvement of student writing unless the theory is changed to incorporate the difference between the composing and the revising process.

There seems to be a difference in the way writers look at their writing after they have put words on paper. Most writers agree that during the composing of a first draft their main concern is to get words on paper, to discover a text. Sommers states that, during the writing of the first draft of the texts that she asked them to write, the experienced writers in her study were mostly concerned about defining their territory or finding out what they had to say

about their topic.<sup>19</sup> This discovery process is unique to each writer studied. Faigley and Witte state that experienced writers have diverse ways of composing a first draft. They discovered everything from almost perfect drafts, to a stream-of-consciousness text that was later revised into an organized essay.<sup>20</sup> Flower and Hayes theorize that writers create goals for themselves while writing, whether they are to compose a sentence, to organize a paragraph, or to redefine a topic.<sup>21</sup> Any of the processes of writing can occur at any time during this first draft. The writer moves from narrowing the topic to checking the grammar, often within the same sentence. Although experienced writers made organizational and grammatical decisions during the writing of a first draft, their primary goal was not to perfect the text, but to create the text. This creation process does appear to be recursive and not linear. In my own writing, I have often observed that during the writing of a first draft I often labor over individual sentences only to glance back and change the beginning of the very paragraph that I am working on. However, after I have actually produced a text I look at it in a different way. Instead of being concerned about expressing ideas, I become concerned about how those ideas are expressed.

The recursion theory fails to consider the distancing that occurs between the writer and the text after the words are actually down on paper. Changes that a writer makes in the text as he is composing it are not revisions. The

writer cannot separate himself from the creation of the text, and therefore cannot "re-vision" what he is composing. An example of the difference between composing changes and revising is seen by examining the results of Faigley's and Witte's study. They found that experienced writers made mostly meaning changes on their first drafts while making very few surface changes. They attribute this to the expert writer's method of composing, stating that "experts often stop to reread what they have written, making significant retrospective adjustments as they move forward in writing a text. Reviewing of texts in progress also helps experts to generate additional content."<sup>22</sup> However, when experts were asked to revise an inexperienced writer's text they used three processes: addition, consolidation, and distribution. "They condensed what the students had written and then either elaborated or added information to support the points the students apparently had wanted to make."<sup>23</sup>

When expert writers had to generate a first draft without any prewritten text to work from, they made many meaning changes in the course of producing a text. Nevertheless, when the same writers were given an inexperienced writer's text to rework, their first drafts showed no meaning changes. There is a difference between composing a text and merely generating a first draft. When the writer is not involved in the generation of ideas, the changes take on a different level of involvement. One of Sommers' experienced writers stated,



"I have learned from experience that I need to keep writing a first draft until I figure out what I want to say. Then in a second draft, I begin to see the structure of an argument and how all the various sub-arguments which are buried beneath the surface of all those sentences are related."<sup>24</sup>

Thus the writer sees his text with a different eye after he completes the composing process.

The composing process differs greatly from one writer to another, and what is included in the composing process also differs from one writer to another. If a writer has internalized many stylistic and organizational conventions, then that writer's composing process will include many stylistic and organizational changes. On the other hand, if the writer has internalized none of these conventions, then the composing process will be primarily getting words on paper. The composing process includes any changes a writer makes during the writing of the first draft of a text. After a first draft has been produced, revision begins when the writer stops thinking about what he is going to say and starts thinking about how he said it. The difference between composing and revision is the amount of distance between the writer and text. After a writer has actually produced a text, his revision process is almost predictable. First the experienced writer looks at the organization of

text and its relation to the audience. Faigley and Witte found that "Expert adults . . . made fewer surface changes between drafts (28.7 per 1000 words), devoting their energies instead to reworking the content of their drafts."<sup>25</sup> Sommers found that "the experienced writers describe their primary objective when revising as finding the form or shape of their argument."<sup>26</sup> After finding the organization of the text, experienced writers often turn their attention to stylistic concerns. One writer in the Sommers' study stated, "My first draft is usually very scattered. In rewriting, I find the line of argument. After the argument is resolved, I am much more interested in word choice and phrasing."<sup>27</sup> This shift in emphasis was also noted by Faigley and Witte, who found that

During and after the writing of the second draft . . . expert adults and advanced students turned their attention to Surface Changes, cleaning up their manuscripts after they had satisfactorily dealt with their subjects.<sup>28</sup>

It is clear that after the production of a text the writer's attention shifts from the gathering of ideas to the presentation of those ideas. If in fact revision is not just any change made anywhere in the production of a text, what is it? Revision should be defined as steps taken by a writer after a text has been composed to bring that text in line with such rhetorical concerns as audience, organization,

and style. To establish that writer revision did indeed follow the pattern that seemed obvious in Sommers and Faigley and Witte, I did a study of advanced composition students. I picked advanced composition students for several reasons.

First, in the advanced composition classes at Oklahoma State University, each student is required to revise each essay three times and the instructor keeps each draft and places it in a student file. Thus I had an easily available set of manuscripts that corresponded in number and type to those used by Sommers, and Faigley and Witte. Second, these students were enrolled in English 1213, a Freshman Honors English class which is designed for students with an ACT Language Arts score of 24 or above. I believed that these students, while not representative of the typical freshman composition student, were at least more representative of beginning writers than experienced writers, and thus would give me a clearer picture of what revision students were actually capable of. Also, since my ultimate goal was to find some teachable pattern for revision, I believed that advanced composition students would not have fully internalized their writing processes, and that if indeed revision is linear, then their writing process would reflect a stage-oriented approach. Third, I hoped that, since I was not the instructor of this particular class, their texts would not reflect any prompting on my part.

The students in the study were required by the original

instructor to put their essays through an eight-step process:

- (1) Thesis sentence
- (2) Outline
- (3) Introductory paragraph
- (4) Rough draft
- (5) In-class workshop
- (6) Conference with instructor
- (7) Final version (which is graded)
- (8) Error revision (no credit given)

Students generally revised their essays after step five and again after step six. The instructor made oral comments during the conference and extensive written comments on the final version of the essay. Students were encouraged to take revision seriously between steps six and seven.

During the course of the semester, techniques such as diagramming sentence length, sentence combining, labeling sentence structures, circling prepositions and forms of the verb "to be" were employed to help students improve the structure of their prose. Advanced students were also guided in their revision by peer comments made after the first rough draft, and by their own self-evaluation made after they had completed the final draft of an essay.

I studied each student's essay, and its multiple drafts, with three concerns in mind. I wanted to see if the students made any progress in their revisions from essay to essay and if their revision process changed during the semester. I also sought what type of revision the

students performed and at what place in the writing process. I was particularly interested in the frequency of organizational changes and whether these revisions made a difference in their final products. One of the reasons that this particular revision intrigued me is that both Sommers and Faigley and Witte found organizational revision missing in the student essays that they studied; however, it played a prominent role in the revision of the experienced writers. The third area I wanted to research was the relationship between the number of drafts a student wrote and the number of grammatical errors that appeared in the final draft.

I divided the students' revisions into six categories: addition, deletion, organization, grammar, word choice, and detail. Three changes in one category in one draft would constitute a revision under that category. Therefore, if one student had three or more deletions in one draft he would be counted under the deletion category. Each student could be counted in as many categories as he qualified for. I defined one addition change as two or more sentences added to the text, and one deletion change as two or more sentences deleted from the text. I defined one organization change as the movement of blocks (groups of sentences, paragraphs) of information. A grammar change was defined as any grammatical, punctuation, or mechanical change made in the text. Word-choice revisions were defined as corrections in the diction level, or changes in words for informative or emotive reasons, and I defined detail revisions as the addition of descriptive adjectives or

sentences to the text that added either clarity or color.

Thus I divided the study by essay number and by individual students. At the beginning of the semester, only six of the eleven students I studied turned in more than one draft of essay one. Table I, below, shows the breakdown of the types of revision the students made, and at what stage of the writing process those revisions were made. Out of these six students four attempted a change in the organization of their essay. Two of these students completed these changes in the second draft of the essay, but the other two never showed a firm grasp of the organization of their material, thus causing the disparity in the grades shown under the heading "Students With Organization Changes." The students who made no organizational changes generally made lower grades than their counterparts. However, just as the two lowest grades of the organizational revision group were made by students who never had a good grasp of their content, the two worst grades in this section were made by students who made no changes at all except word-choice or grammatical-error correction. The table also indicates that students made more organizational changes in the first drafts than the later drafts. Addition and deletion revisions were also widely used in the early stages of revision. Those students who had more than one draft of their essay performed more deletion and grammar correction than anything else in their later drafts.

Essay two showed the same pattern as shown in essay one

TABLE I  
ESSAY ONE

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Number of students with more than one draft of essay 1--6

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Types of Revision

---

From Draft 1 to Draft 2		From Draft 2 to Draft 3	
Type	Number of Students	Type	Number of Students
Addition	4	Deletion	2
Deletion	6	Organization	3
Organization	4	Grammar	3
Grammar	6*		

---

\*Reflects the revisions of students with only 2 drafts of their essay

---

Breakdown of Grades

---

Students with Organizational Changes		Students without Organizational Changes	
A-	2	B	2
B-	2	B-	2
C	1	C	1
		D	1

---

of first dealing with organization and then style. Table II, below, shows that as in essay one students performed much organizational revision along with addition and deletion. The number of word-choice, detail, and sentence-structure revisions was minimal, and can be attributed to the students without multiple drafts. The revisions made between the second and third drafts of essay two are essentially a collection of revision techniques; however, word choice was the most frequently used. For this assignment nine students out of eleven constructed more than one draft of their essay, and all nine incorporated some type of organizational revision between the first and second drafts of their essays. Out of these students the two lowest marks were given to students with unresolved problems in their final drafts; one student made no corrections in his final draft and the other student never grasped an organizational method for the essay. However, even the two lowest grades in this section were better than the grades of students who made no organizational changes at all.

Essay two seemed to be the turning point for most students. It was the first essay in which the students made graphs of their sentence structure and noted their use of the forms of the verb "to be" and their use of prepositions. For some students these techniques made a difference, especially the outlining of the sentence structure. I was surprised to discover that although students marked prepositions, for the most part no one ever removed them. This



TABLE II  
ESSAY TWO

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Number of students with more than one draft of essay two--9

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Types of Revision

---

From Draft 1 to Draft 2

From Draft 2 to Draft 3

---

Type	Number of Students	Type	Number of Students
Addition	6	Addition	3
Deletion	7	Deletion	3
Organization	9	Organization	2
Grammar	1	Grammar	3
Word Choice	2	Word Choice	6
Detail	4	Detail	2

---

Breakdown of Grades

---

Students with  
Organizational Changes

Students without  
Organizational Changes

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A	1	B-	1
A-	3	C-	1
B+	2		
B	1		
B-	2*		

---

\*One student quit revising after the first draft; the other student had organizational problems.

essay also had the most organizational changes. Many of the better students started making major changes in the early drafts of their essay. Often, draft one and draft two did not appear to be the same essay except for subject matter. For the most part students started using the first draft almost as if it were prewriting; they wrote long rambling drafts out of which they later pulled their best ideas to organize in the second draft. I also noticed that in essay two, as in the previous essay, when a student could not find a suitable organization for the essay topic, he could not pay attention to grammar or word choice errors. This inability to switch focus seems to support Sommers' and Nold's theories of the writer's need to pay attention to only one aspect at a time. Sommers observes that

Even though these experienced writers place the predominant weight upon finding the form of their argument during the first cycle, other concerns exist as well. Conversely during the later cycles, when the experienced writers' primary attention is focused upon stylistic concerns, they are still attuned, although in a reduced way, to the form of the argument.<sup>29</sup>

For experienced writers these revision processes of arrangement and style might flow together smoothly, but even for advanced students they remain separate processes that must be addressed one at a time.

Essay number three, which marked the mid-point of the semester, reinforces my previous findings. Table III, below, shows a clear division in the students' revision practices. As seen in Table III, students made many organizational revisions between the first and second drafts and more stylistic changes between the second and third drafts. Overall the students' grades started improving and they began constructing more drafts of the essay. One student wrote four complete drafts and three partial drafts (rewrites of one or two paragraphs). Again, the fact that the worst grade on this essay was made by a student who made no changes after his second draft reinforces my theory that revision is a two-step process. It appears that at this point in the semester students started internalizing some of the conventions of writing, because essay four shows a change in many students' writing processes.

Table IV, below, shows that fewer students made obvious organizational changes where they moved entire paragraphs or word groups. However, many students were now using the first draft as a sounding board to gather ideas which they later narrowed to produce a second, third, or fourth draft. Other students did their organizing in the brainstorming exercise they were required to turn in. Thus there was a decline in organizational changes made in the actual drafts of the essay. Essay four also saw a rise in the amount of deletion performed by students. Often after writing a prolific first draft, a student would narrow the essay down

TABLE III  
ESSAY THREE

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Number of students with more than one draft of essay three--  
9

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Types of Revision

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From Draft 1 to Draft 2

From Draft 2 to Draft 3

---

Type	Number of Students	Type	Number of Students
Addition	4	Deletion	5
Deletion	5	Grammar	3
Organization	8	Word Choice	6
Word Choice	2	Detail	4
Detail	3		

---

Breakdown of Grades

---

Students with  
Organizational Changes

Students without  
Organizational Changes

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A	2	B	3
A-	3	B-	1
B+	1		
B	1		
C-	1*		

---

\*Although the student turned in three drafts, the second and third drafts were identical

TABLE IV  
ESSAY FOUR

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Number of students with more than one draft of essay four--9

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Types of Revision

---

From Draft 1 to Draft 2		From Draft 2 to Draft 3	
Type	Number of Students	Type	Number of Students
Addition	8	Addition	6
Deletion	8	Deletion	3
Organization	6	Grammar	2
Grammar	1	Word Choice	4
Word Choice	3	Detail	4
Detail	4		

---

Breakdown of Grades

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Students with Organizational Changes		Students without Organizational Changes	
A+	1	A	1
A	1	A-	1
A-	11	B	1
B	1	B+	1
C	1*	B-	1

---

\*Although this student turned three drafts, the second and third drafts were identical.

to a workable amount of material by deleting unnecessary examples and side issues. The most common organizational change at this point was the rewriting of introductions. The Appendix (pp. 41-51) shows that in essay four students who did not make organizational changes made changes in their introductions, either changing them completely or making significant changes in content. I believe that this separation of revision processes between the introduction and the main body occurs because the writer either changes the organization of the essay to fit what he feels is an exceptional introduction, or changes the introduction to predict better the final structure of the essay.

Another point about this essay is that the students in general made fewer revisions of any type between drafts two and three. Possibly this decrease occurred because the students were finally internalizing some of the grammar and diction strategies employed by experienced writers.

Essay five was the hardest to analyze for several reasons. First, it was the last essay of the semester and I believe that the students were lax in turning in initial drafts and brainstorming exercises. Second, some of the revisions of this essay were so extensive that it became difficult to identify the revision as addition, deletion or organization. Since I had decided to define organizational revision as the movement of existing content, it was difficult to decide whether or not the retention of single sentences--though placed in a new position in the essay--

actually constituted an organizational change. I compromised by deciding that if the sentence carried an idea essential to the writer's point, I considered the movement of that sentence an organizational change. It is apparent from studying Table V, below, that students, at this point in the semester, had internalized much of their previously outwardly defined revisions. The revisions of this essay came the closest to the revisions of experienced writers described by other researchers. As students gained experience with the draft-writing technique of revision, their writing process became more internalized, but it was not recursive. There was still a definite separation between arrangement and stylistic revision, even when most of the arrangement decisions were made in either the brainstorming activities or somewhere between the first and second drafts in the production of an almost totally new essay.

In summary my research has brought several facts to light. First the revision process does not seem to be as recursive as previously believed. Although the composing process appears to have no linear form, after a written text is initially created both experienced writers and advanced students perform their revisions in a linear manner. This pattern is most obvious in beginning writers, perhaps because of their inability to focus their attention on more than one procedure at a time, or perhaps because they have not internalized writing strategies such as the ones Nold suggests to help them limit their focus. However, a pattern

TABLE V  
ESSAY FIVE

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Number of students with more than one draft of essay five--9

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Types of Revision

From Draft 1 to Draft 2		From Draft 2 to Draft 3	
Type	Number of Students	Type	Number of Students
Addition	6	Addition	3
Deletion	8	Deletion	7
Organization	3	Grammar	1
Word Choice	2	Word Choice	6
Detail	1	Detail	3

Breakdown of Grades

Students with Organizational Changes		Students without Organizational Changes	
A	3	A	4
		A-	4
		B+	1
		B	1



does exist. After they have produced a text, writers focus on arrangement and then style. Thus Edward P. J. Corbett's book based on Aristotle's classical rhetoric--a linear invention, arrangement, and style--is more in line with the writing process than the recursionists are willing to admit.

This study also suggests that students must master each step of the revision process before they can focus on the next step. As several students in the study showed, when they could not find an organizational pattern that they were satisfied with, the stylistic aspect of their writing suffered. Also, some students experimented with arrangement early in their revision or composing process either by rewriting sections of their drafts or by rearranging large sections of their writing as well as small details. They were able to move from that stage more quickly and spend more time working with detail and word choice. Students who try to combine these revision processes often cannot perform either of them well. For example, students who recopied their second draft for their third draft often ended up with more grammatical errors than students who became actively involved in stylistic decisions such as word choice and detail. These errors could be the result of the student not being able to concentrate on stylistic concerns when he is still worried about the overall content or organization of the text. Therefore, it appears that writers cannot focus on both arrangement and style at the same time. The study done by Faigley and Witte supports this theory. These

researchers observed that

during and after the writing of the second draft . . . expert adults and advanced students turned their attention to Surface Changes, cleaning up their manuscripts after they had satisfactorily dealt with their subjects.<sup>30</sup>

As a writer gains experience, parts of these steps become internalized or relegated to a more abstract form, such as brainstorming. To expand an analogy used earlier, it seems that learning to write is similar in nature to learning ballet. A beginning ballerina learns basic feet and arm positions, and as she is taught more complicated moves the individual steps are quite evident. She first places her foot out with her toes pointed and then moves her arms in a circular motion, but after years of practice, a prima ballerina makes the movements appear as a single flow of action; she no longer thinks in terms of steps even though she still performs the movement in a sequence of steps. Just as a beginning ballerina cannot simply copy the motions of prima ballerinas, neither can beginning writers simply copy the writing process of experienced writers. And like the prima ballerina's movements, the writing process of experts is still performed in stages even though those stages have been internalized so that they look like an ongoing process.

This research with advanced students seems to point out

the trouble in student writing as the organizational stage of revision. These advanced students made their worst grades when they became satisfied with their prose after the first draft. (Often they made more grammatical errors than their classmates who revised extensively.) Carolyn Boiarsky, in "The Eleven Functions of Revision," states that

Students need to be made aware of the variety of organizational structures which professional writers use and encouraged to experiment with various formats if they are to learn to select from among them the one which best presents the content for a particular piece.<sup>31</sup>

If so, then to develop a teachable form of revision we must center our efforts on teaching organization even before grammatical correctness.

However, recursionists have taught us one thing, that no two writers have the same writing process; we cannot inflict a set of "process" rules on unsuspecting inexperienced writers. Nor can we leave them in a confused writer's block for lack of guidelines. Is there a middle ground where teachers can provide students with guidelines without iron-clad rules and regulations? I think there is, and teachers have been moving closer to that middle ground in recent years simply by applying what works in a classroom. If teaching conditions were perfect (as many teachers have noted before me), class size would be small and the teacher

would be able to tailor the curriculum to meet each student's needs. Since these conditions are very rarely if ever present, the guidelines that any writing theory must provide need to fit a wide range of writing ability.

Several theories that have already been published could be used effectively in the classroom. Roland K. Huff's article "Teaching Revision: A Mode of the Drafting Process" stresses the writer's using multiple drafts to work on different aspects of his writing.<sup>32</sup> This is a step in the right direction, but Huff is reluctant to provide guidelines about what direction these drafts should take. Often I have had a student bring a first draft to me thinking that there was nothing wrong with that draft and not knowing what to change when I asked him to rewrite or revise. True, we need to encourage students to "stop trying to make a final draft of their first draft,"<sup>33</sup> but when we ask them to revise we also need to tell them what to try to improve the draft. William Pixton suggests teaching Burke's Pentad or Larson's questions, or even Young, Becker and Pike's tagmemics as a way of helping inexperienced writers think about such things as arrangement and audience.<sup>34</sup> Other theorists such as Willa S. Wolcott suggest giving the student a series of specific revisions to complete before handing in a final draft. This series could include such steps as

- 1) Revising for weak organization
- 2) Revising for inadequate development
- 3) Revising for irrelevant material

- 4) Revising for redundancy
- 5) Revising for poor word choice<sup>35</sup>

But these types of guidelines seem to miss the purpose of revision as stated by Boiarsky: "The purpose of revision is not to change a syntactic unit, whether it is the word or the paragraph, but rather to clarify an idea."<sup>36</sup> This statement reminds us that revision cannot be carried out in the absence of purpose.

I think that there are three concepts that the composition teacher should stress to help the inexperienced student in each of the stages of revision. First, we should stress that multiple drafts are not a waste of the student's time and notebook paper, either by making them part of the student's grade or by having them do more draft writing in class. Brainstorming and illegible first drafts often lead the writer to a better grasp of the material. Until the student figures out what he wants to say, he cannot effectively concentrate on either arrangement or style. We must teach students to focus not on grammar and getting the sentence into perfect grammatical form, but on getting words on paper. Sommers' has stated that "students decide to stop revising when they decide that they have not violated any of the rules for revising."<sup>37</sup> I have found that when I require a student to turn in only one draft, that student writes only one draft; however, if I require students to turn in either some type of brainstorming or a first draft that I then review with the student (usually during classtime),

then the student is forced to think about what to write before sitting down to write the essay. In my study, students who did extensive prewriting work had significantly better final drafts than students who tried to write what they wanted to say the first time they sat down to write. For example, student eight (Appendix, p. 48) turned in multiple drafts and did consistently better than student three (Appendix, p. 43), who consistently turned in one draft which had been slightly modified to meet the requirements of the course.

When recursionists state that revision is an ongoing process with no divisions, they do a disservice to students, who need to be taught that revision consists of focusing on different aspects of a text at different times. As seen in student eleven's work (Appendix, p. 51) at the beginning of the course the student progressed through definite stages of brainstorming, organizing, and then polishing. Later in the course, the first two operations ran together to form one complex stage of composing.

The second concept composition teachers need to stress is organization, as student eleven first did on a conscious level and later absorbed into his composing process. Teachers need to show students that after they get words on paper they need to consider such things as audience and purpose. Many students, such as student three, never consider audience or purpose because they never become comfortable with changing those "wonderful" words that they

have produced in the first drafts; beginning students might not be familiar with what is involved in this stage of revision. However, I believe that the consideration of audience and purpose should not be taught as part of the composing process, as many linear theorists would suggest; instead, I believe that it is a part of revision. Sommers found in her study that experienced writers often thought of audience and purpose after the first draft of the paper was complete. Sommers states that "the anticipation of a reader's judgment causes a feeling of dissonance when the writer recognizes incongruities between intention and execution, and requires these writers to make revision on all levels."<sup>38</sup> It is natural for a writer to look back over his work and think about how the reader would respond to certain statements and how other statements help accomplish his purpose. It is unnatural to expect the writer to review his writing for such concerns while he is in the very act of composing. Thus these concepts should be taught where they are the most practical, as a part of revision.

After this organizational revision, teachers should focus on a different type of revision. Stylistic and grammatical revision is probably the most familiar type of revision for most students. It includes cleaning up grammatical errors and working on diction and sentence structure. In my study I found that students, when freed from these concerns in their first drafts, do much better at finding and correcting this type of error in later

drafts. Student one (Appendix, p. 41) tried to submit "perfect" first drafts. He made few if any changes on subsequent drafts. Interestingly, he still had many grammatical mistakes on his final drafts. Student ten (Appendix, p. 50) did most of his grammatical changes on the last draft of the essays, except on essay three, in which he made few changes after the second draft and consequently had more grammar errors on the final draft than on any previous draft.

Contrary to what recursion theorists believe, the revision process is in fact linear. However, among experienced writers these stages often run together and appear to be one smooth process. Nevertheless, students must be taught a linear method of revision if they are to improve their revision ability. I believe that students need to be taught a two-stage revision process. First they need to write, to compose, without regard for organizational or stylistic concerns. Only after the completion of a first draft, so that a writer can distance himself from the text, can any revision take place. The first stage of revision involves teaching the students to find an audience and a purpose for the text and then modifying the text, even if it means rewriting substantial sections and attaining a new organization. In the second stage, student revise for grammatical and stylistic errors. This linear plan for revision provides the student with guidelines for improving his text without restricting the student's composing process.



This plan is easy to teach, easy for the students to understand, and best of all places revision back in its proper place--after the first draft.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Nancy Sommers, "The Need for Theory in Composition Research," College Composition and Communication, 30(1979), p. 48.

<sup>2</sup>Karen Hodges, "A History of Revision: Theory versus Practice," Revising: New Essays for Teachers of Writing, ed. Ronald Sudol (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1982), pp. 24-39.

<sup>3</sup>William Irmsher, Teaching Expository Writing (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1979).

<sup>4</sup>Nancy Sommers, "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Writers," College Composition and Communication, 31(1980), p. 381. (All subsequent citations of Sommers' work are to this article).

<sup>5</sup>Linda Flower and John Hayes, "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing," CCC, 32(1981), p. 367.

<sup>6</sup>Flower and Hayes, p. 367.

<sup>7</sup>Flower and Hayes, p. 368.

<sup>8</sup>Sommers, p. 380.

<sup>9</sup>Donna M. Grout, "A Normal Constant," Missouri English Bulletin, 41(1983), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>Lester Faigley and Stephen Witte, "Analyzing Revision," CCC, 32(1981), pp. 408-409.

<sup>11</sup>Ellen W. Nold, "Revising: Intentions and Conventions," Revising: New Essays for Teachers of Writing, ed. Ronald Sudol (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1982), pp. 13-23.

<sup>12</sup>Sommers, p. 387.

<sup>13</sup>William H. Pixton, "Reconciling Revising with Reality in Composition Teaching," Missouri English Bulletin, 21 (1983), p. 22.

<sup>14</sup>Faigley and Witte, p. 401.

<sup>15</sup>Mimi Schwartz, "Revision Profiles: Patterns and Implications," CCC, 45(1983), p. 549.

<sup>16</sup>Sommers, p. 380.

<sup>17</sup>Faigley and Witte, p. 407.

<sup>18</sup>Nold, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup>Sommers, p. 384.

<sup>20</sup>Faigley and Witte, p. 410.

<sup>21</sup>Flower and Hayes, p. 377.

<sup>22</sup>Faigley and Witte, p. 407.

<sup>23</sup>Faigley and Witte, p. 409.

<sup>24</sup>Sommers, p. 384.

<sup>25</sup>Faigley and Witte, pp. 408-409.

<sup>26</sup>Sommers, p. 384.

<sup>27</sup>Sommers, p. 384.

<sup>28</sup>Faigley and Witte, p. 409.

<sup>29</sup>Sommers, p. 385.

<sup>30</sup>Faigley and Witte, p. 409.

<sup>31</sup>Carolyn Boiarsky, "The Eleven Functions of Revision,"

Revising: New Essays for Teachers of Writing, ed. Ronald Sudol. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1982, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup>Roland Huff, "Teaching Revising: A Model of the Drafting Process," CCC, 45(1983), pp. 800-816.

<sup>33</sup>Huff, p. 805.

<sup>34</sup>Pixton, p. 22.

<sup>35</sup>Willa S. Wolcott, "Helping Basic Writers Revise," Missouri English Bulletin, 41(1983), p. 41.

<sup>36</sup>Boiarsky, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup>Sommers, p. 382.

<sup>38</sup>Sommers, p. 387.

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APPENDIX

BREAKDOWN OF ESSAYS BY STUDENTS

Student 1

<u>Essay 1</u> B-	<u>Essay 2</u> B-	<u>Essay 3</u> C-
no revision	1 to 2	1 to 2
two drafts only	Detail	Detail
1 to 2	Deletion	Deletion
word choice	Organization	Organization
grammar (little)	2 to 3	2 to 3
	no change	no change

<u>Essay 4</u> C	<u>Essay 5</u> B
1 to 2	many drafts
Detail	1 to 2
Deletion	Deletion
Addition	Addition
Organization	2 to 3
2 to 3	Deletion
Detail	Word Choice

Student 2Essay 1 C

1 to 2

Detail

Word Choice

2 to 3

Detail

Intro Change

Word Order

Essay 2 B+

1 to 2

Deletion

Addition

Organization

Detail

Intro Change

2 to 3

Deletion

Word Choice

Essay 3 B

1 to 2

Deletion

Detail

Word Choice

2 to 3

Addition

Deletion

Essay 4 B+

1 to 2

Addition

Deletion

Word Choice

2 to 3

Addition

Detail

Essay 5 A

1 to 2

Addition

Deletion

2 to 3

Deletion

Word Choice



Student 3Essay 1 B

one draft

1 to 2

Word Choice

Grammar

Addition

Deletion

Essay 2 C-

one draft

Intro Change

Grammar

Essay 5 A-

1 to 2

Deletion

Addition

2 to 3

Deletion

Word Choice

Essay 3 B+

one draft

Deletions

Addition

Organization

Word Choice

Essay 4 B-

one draft

Word Choice

Grammar

Student 4Essay 1 A-

1 to 2

Organization

Word Choice

Intro Change

Deletion

2 to 3

Organizational

Deletion

Grammar

Word Choice

Essay 2 A-

1 to 2

Deletion

Addition

Organization

Word Choice

2 to 3

Grammar

Essay 3 A

1 to 2

new essay

2 to 3

Transitions

Deletion

Word Choice

Essay 4 A

1 to 2

Intro Change

Addition

Detail

2 to 3

Grammar

Addition

Detail

Essay 5

Brainstorming

one draft

Deletion

Organization

Detail

Student 5Essay 1 B

one draft

Additions

Essay 2 B

1 to 2

Deletion

Addition

Organization

2 to 3

new Essay

Essay 3 B

1 to 2

new essay

2 to 3

Deletion

Word Choice

Essay 4 B

one draft

Word Choice

Deletion

Essay 5 A-

1 to 2

Deletion

Detail

2 to 3

Deletion

Student 6Essay 1 B-

one draft

Word Choice

Grammar

Essay 2 B-

one draft

Intro Change

Deletion

Detail

Essay 3 B-

1 to 2

Deletion

2 to 3

Intro Change

Transitions

Essay 4 A

1 to 2

Intro Change

New Essay

2 to 3

Deletion

Addition

Essay 5 A

1 to 2

Organization

Deletion

Addition

2 to 3

Deletion

Grammar

Student 7Essay 1 A-

1 to 2

Intro Change

Deletion

Addition

2 to 3

Deletion

Word Choice

Essay 2 B+

1 to 2

Intro Change

Deletion

Addition

Word Choice

Organization

2 to 3

Addition

Word Choice

Grammar

Essay 3 A-

1 to 2

Intro Change

Deletion

Addition

Organization

2 to 3

Deletion

Detail

Essay 4 A

Brainstorming

1 to 2

Deletion

Addition

Organization

2 to 3

Word Choice

Essay 5 A

many drafts

1 to 2

Deletion

Addition

Word Choice

2 to 3

Word Choice

Detail

Student 8Essay 1 A-

many drafts

1 to 2

Deletion

Organization

2 to 3

Deletion

Essay 2 A

many drafts

1 to 2

Deletion

Organization

Addition

Detail

2 to 3

Intro Change

Word Choice

Deletion

Detail

Essay 3 A

many drafts

1 to 2

Deletion

Organization

Addition

2 to 3

Transitions

Grammar

Word Choice

Essay 4 A+

many drafts

1 to 2

Deletion

Organization

Detail

2 to 3

Deletion

Addition

Word Choice

Essay 5 A

many drafts

1 to 2

Deletion

Organization

Word Choice

2 to 3

Deletion

Word Choice

Student 9Essay 1 B-

one draft

Deletion

Addition

Organization

Essay 2 B

1 to 2

Intro Change

Addition

Organization

2 to 3

Deletion

Word Choice

Grammar

Essay 3

not available

Essay 4 A-

1 to 2

new essay

2 to 3

Addition

Organization

Detail

Essay 5 A

1 to 2

Deletion

Addition

Organization

2 to 3

Deletion

Detail

Student 10Essay 1 B-

1 to 2

Intro Change

Deletion

2 to 3

Grammar

Essay 2 A-

1 to 2

Intro Change

Organization

2 to 3

Addition

Word Choice

Essay 3 A-

many drafts

1 to 2

Intro Change

Deletion

Addition

Organization

2 to 3

Deletion

Detail

Essay 4 A-

Brainstorming

1 to 2

Organization

Deletion

Addition

2 to 3

Addition

Word Choice

Essay 5 B+

one draft



Student 11Essay 1 C

many drafts  
 Brainstorming  
 1 to 2  
 Deletions  
 Organization  
 2 to 3  
 Organization

Essay 2 A-

Brainstorming  
 1 to 2  
 new essay  
 2 to 3  
 Transitions  
 Detail

Essay 3 A-

Brainstorming  
 1 to 2  
 Organization  
 Transitions  
 Detail  
 2 to 3  
 Detail  
 Grammar  
 Word Choice

Essay 4 B

Brainstorming  
 1 to 2  
 Organization  
 Deletion  
 Addition  
 Detail  
 2 to 3  
 Deletion  
 Grammar  
 Word Choice

Essay 5

Brainstorming  
 1 to 2  
 many drafts  
 Deletion  
 2 to 3  
 Deletion  
 Word Choice  
 Addition

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