Restlessness, Revision, and Multigenre

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This thesis explores the importance of restlessness in revision from the perspective of a writer and teacher of writing. This phenomenon, which naturally recurs throughout the writing process, is key to understanding what effective revision is and how to do it most effectively. The thesis has a secondary focus on multigenre writing because it offers a powerful means for understanding revision and conducting it authentically. Thus, both the content and structure of the thesis strive to present and apply the theories of restless revision and multigenre writing.
# REVISION, RESTLESSNESS AND MULTIGENRE

By
Jennifer Bradbury

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Revision, Restlessness, and Multigenre

Revision is perhaps the most important and most misunderstood step in the writing process. Students too often view it as a punishment for not succeeding the first time, and teachers view it as something almost impossible to teach effectively. Writers of all varieties know how important it is in the craft, but many disagree on exactly when it occurs, or exactly how it can be characterized.

This thesis examines the concept of revision as viewed through the lens of what appears to be a primary ingredient—restlessness. Nancy Welch, a professor at the University of New Hampshire, first advanced this notion of restlessness—the unsettling feelings that emanate from a piece of writing in need of revision—in her 1997 book *Getting Restless*. But there is substantial evidence in a number of composition theorists and writing teachers to support her ideas and to confirm that restlessness is not only a natural and essential element in revision but also that cultivation of and attention to that sense is fundamental in creating successful student writers.

Further, multigenre writing offers a powerful means for both capitalizing on that sense of restlessness and providing authentic, important opportunities for meaningful revision. A multigenre paper affords a writer a depth of insight and level of investment that cannot be achieved by any other means because it asks writers to examine and test information through a variety of complementary writing modes. It is in fact, the single best strategy for staging a learning experience wherein restlessness and revision are given adequate opportunity to work.

With this fact in mind, the thesis explores the intersections between these three key concepts and demonstrates them though the vehicle of a multigenre work. By
making use of the multigenre format in presenting narrative, poetry, traditional research, and fiction, the thesis as a whole is able to explore the concept of restlessness in revision in theory and in practice simultaneously. Readers are encouraged to pay attention to how the different genres within the thesis converse with each other, creating unity and clarity as regards the core concept of restlessness in revision through telling and showing, interpretation and execution.
Restless Work, Draft One

I can dig
A deep scar across the surface of an idea
An open sore in the side of a mountain
And read the idea within like something being excavated

But reseeing

Is like a lump of coal
Ideas pressed
Packed down
Compacted into language

Pressure, time, thought,
The heat of process does its work
To birth that
Rough, raw diamond

I can take that one, single rough raw stone
Find a crack that lets me in
And cut a face
And cut a face
And cut a face

Moving myself around it
Each tiny deliberate cut
A poem
A story
A conversation

That lets that idea
In all its beauty
Complexity
And flaws
Come shining through.
**Becoming a Rewriter**

I’m a middle child. Correction, I’m the middle child that Donahue used to feature on specials, the one who caused inordinate problems for her suffering mother. I was (and maybe still am) a problem child.

But I am also a writer. Not a shout it from the rooftops, “Look at me! I wrote that!” kind of writer, but one who’s been slowly coming to terms with the reality that it’s more an itch I have to scratch than some destiny or gift. What becomes apparent as I examine the way these two facets of my personality interact is that they have everything to do with each other and my process. But what I hope I’m becoming as I grow up and leave my problem child ways behind is a *rewriter*.

I can trace the desire to make such a shift in writing back to about eight years ago. During my undergraduate work, a favorite professor assigned an essay asking us to explore our writing process and literary history. As a true problem child who never quite got over the need to be different and push boundaries (a trait I’m sure merits diagnosis and hours of expensive therapy) I embarked on a metaphorical explanation of my writing process in connection with laundry. It was clever and most of it was true. True that I used to nest in piles of dirty laundry with a stack of books when my asthma meant I had to go inside and rest. True that in high school I wrote angst-ridden poetry, and features for the school paper in the room of the small house we moved to after my parents divorce. There the aging dryer served as my muse, as I listened to its tumbling and squeaking through the thin wall separating my room from the utility closet as I wrote. And true that the two processes—washing clothes and writing—bore startling similarities. I remember being pleased with myself as I compared prewriting to sorting, drafting to washing, revising to doing it again, editing to drying, and wearing again to
publishing. I recall admitting, almost 8 years ago, that perhaps my weakest stage in both processes was revision. I was as content to let a paper go when I knew there were elements that still required attention as I was to wear grass-stained jeans, or white shirts turned pink by the red sock that shouldn’t have snuck into the washer. I tended to focus on the act of creating, revising a bit as I went, but largely plowing through in an effort to simply get something done, to cross a task off a list, to call something complete.

Yet even then, I was growing increasingly dissatisfied with my lack of extensive revision (and my not-so-clean clothes). And I find today that not only have I revised my process but also my attitude about writing. Perhaps after five years of working with student writers in whom I recognized my own desire to finish something—my own notion that to revise was penance for not getting it right the first time—has gained me a little perspective. Maybe I’m just older. Or maybe I’ve just finally figured out that my writing process has always been all about revision, all about letting myself linger over something that doesn’t quite work.

That restlessness—at all stages of the process—has become the defining element of my writing in the eight years since I first explored this topic. With my students, restlessness began after surviving the first year and wondering if I’d really taught them much about writing instead of just reinforcing what they might have done before. I did a few activities focused on revision and some even worked, but I knew I needed to do more. I admitted to myself that perhaps my job at this point in my students’ writing careers was not to teach them how to write a sentence, a paragraph, a 3.5 essay, or a narrative so much as it was to teach them how to rewrite those pieces. This admission
also meant I had to start modeling my own restlessness as a reader of their work and
writer of my own.

These thoughts and lessons coalesced during a Barry Lane workshop I attended,
whose textbook, *After the End*, I’d read in college. He challenged me to see the writing
process not as linear with revision as a defined stage, but as one that was a constant
process of reseeing, rereading, and rewriting. It was true that I’d been revising all along
in my own writing. As a muller who thinks for months sometimes about what I intend to
write before I actually begin, writing dialogue or a scene in my head over and over again
before I actually sit down to compose, revision was happening most often in the middle
of a five mile run or in the car driving to the grocery story. Even in this stage, when the
restlessness I feel when I’ve got a story to try to tell begins to brew, when that itch
becomes too much to ignore, I know I’m revising. And I know that revision recurs
steadily throughout my process. So when I realized these truths about my own writing
and began trying to convince my students to pay attention to similar occurrences in their
processes, the process finally began to click.

Despite this epiphany, I got a much-needed reminder of the importance of restless
revision during what turned out to be the greatest writing challenge of my life thus far. I
had finally decided to tell the story of what it was like growing up with a schizophrenic
father who carried his family along for the ride (and still does). I novelized the account,
and set a goal for finishing it in time to submit to Delacorte Press’s Contest for a First
Young Adult novel. The work on the story was the most difficult work I’d ever
undertaken, but it felt *so good* to scratch that itch, to deal with that restless story that had
been rattling the bars of its cage inside me for so long. And I did revise significantly as I
wrote, but I battled a deadline and my old demons of wanting it to be complete more than wanting it to be true.

When the too-thin letter came back in May telling me I had been a finalist but that there were just too many things that still needed attention and would I please resubmit, I had mixed emotions. (Especially since they elected not to select a winner at all. I had hoped to actually get beaten by a person, not my own unwillingness to revise the story sufficiently). But the more of the letter I read, the more honored I felt not by the evidence that he’d read my work and even liked some of it, but by his honest, open, and authentically restless response to my work. I also felt encouraged that those elements he thought were off in some way were largely the same parts that bothered me, made me restless and made me say to my husband as he read the drafts, “It’s fine don’t worry about it.”

What I hope I’m learning as I rework this novel is that those cracks are the windows into real revision, and as a teacher/writer, I owe it to myself, my family, my students and my readers to go deep into those places and allow what happens there to change me and my text.

And I know this is true. I know the story has to change, and that I will continue to change with it as I revise. It will be tough—perhaps even tougher than drafting the novel in the first place—but I can take encouragement from author Joan Bauer. She described her Newberry Award winning book *Hope was Here*—a story she nearly cast aside numerous times because it so completely exhausted her in the later stages of its development—as a problem child that made the turnaround to make her proud. Perhaps, if I fully give myself over and let the restlessness of revision do its work in me, maybe there’s a chance for two problem children to make good.
Restless Revision

What is Revision?

Since product-based writing was overthrown in the process revolution so many years ago, revision has been widely understood to be an important part of any writer’s routine. Yet it would seem clear that though its importance is understood, actually understanding what revision is—in its meanings, forms, and practice—presents more of an issue for students and instructors alike. Over the past thirty years of rhetorical study, several leading teachers and thinkers have posited their definitions and rationales on the why and how of revision. What has emerged from these voices is a sense of revision both as a recursive process, as a means of “re-seeing” a text, and as Donald Murray mused in *The Craft of Writing*, as “an adventure in meaning” (44). With this definition in mind, the topic of revision merits exploration for its importance and frequency in the writing process, and for the fact that understanding a variety of definitions can enhance both the practice and instruction of revision as a discipline.

Despite widespread agreement that revision or rewriting is likely the most important pedagogical stage in process-based writing, it also raises the most significant questions (Neman 144). Fortunately, scholars seem to be reaching a point of agreement regarding what revision is in its most fundamental terms, even if many students and teachers still confuse revision with the idea of editing a text. Donald Murray, perhaps among the most prolific and accessible of academics on the subject, contends that revision is “a private act with an eye cocked toward the reader” (*Crafting* 135). His description is valid, illustrating the need at some point in the writing process to switch from writing largely for the self to writing to be read and understood by an audience.
Peter Elbow, another godfather of process writing and respected authority on revision, subtly reinforces Murray’s notion of revision with his metaphoric description of writing as cooking and growing of ideas, pointing out the importance of accelerating through initial drafts simply because the first versions simply cannot be any good (Writing 44), and that the true work begins in the revision stage. He preaches abandonment and moving past these early drafts in a way that echoes Murray’s thoughts on the transition from writer to reader-based text.

Murray further clarifies the concept of revision, while echoing the sentiments of a host of other academics, in emphasizing the portions of the word “revision” as key in understanding the act. “In rewriting, the focus is on the writer’s own reseeing, in exploring and developing the topic so the writer can discover what to say and how to say it” (Crafting 135). Murray’s peers—Adrienne Rich, Nancy Sommers, and Elbow among them—all contend that the key to understanding revision is the notion of looking at it afresh in such a way that allows writers to gain perspective and a sense of distance.

Thus, the act of revision as reseeing implies a certain element of removal from a text. There are a number of ways that this effect can be achieved by writers and teachers of writing that will be examined later in this paper. For now it is important to consider how students and writers have overlooked the importance of understanding this fundamental truth of revision as reseeing. Nancy Sommers asserts that for too long, students have spoken of revision in “ruthless terms,” as a process of cutting and slashing from the text in a single-minded pursuit of clarity (Welch 19). While some would make a case that this attitude and the resulting practice could be a result of some form of reseeing a text, Sommers and others label it as insufficient and detrimental to truly understanding
and taking full advantage of the revision process. It could also provide a clue as to why Murray contends that nearly all students are equally poor revisers. “The best students fall in love with their first drafts and when they make them superficially correct they think they are finished; the poorest students also look to the mysteries of presentation—spelling, handwriting, mechanics, usage—and see nothing beyond that. But revision is based on re-seeing the entire piece of writing” (Craft XIV). Murray no doubt echoes the concerns of a host of composition theorists with this statement, but one could argue that the students might contend they are reseeing the piece and revising accordingly.

What seems to be missing and thereby allowing students to drift is a primary sense of what Nancy Welch describes in her 1997 book as “restlessness.” Welch, a professor of writing at the University of New Hampshire, contends that a sense of restlessness in the act of revision is not only healthy for creating meaningful, articulate text, but is necessary to truly experience revision and the writing process as well.

**Getting Restless**

Welch’s theory of restlessness in revision would seem to address a number of the failings associated with more traditional ideas. Drawing on Freudian and Feminist theory, she agrees with her forebears in the field when she points out that true revision can take place only in a setting that promotes and supports “an excessive understanding of revision, one that questions the ideal of the complete, contained and disciplined body, the complete, contained, disciplined text” (Welch 165). This clear contention for reseeing allies her with other theorists, but she takes the ideas even further. Rather than the ruthless quality that seems predominate in attitudes regarding rewriting, Welch asserts that the most provocative opportunities for revision lie in those moments in text when
things seem to fit all too neatly together (Welch 6). She draws on Sommers earlier work to remind readers and writers that a profound sense of disharmony or disturbance is the beginning of discovery and learning (Welch 6). Thus Welch challenges the long-standing notion that revision is a process whereby the meaning of a text is managed and controlled, instead advocating revision as an opportunity to investigate meaning (Welch 9).

While Welch’s notion of restlessness is unique, the strength of her ideas is proven in the writing of earlier thinkers and critics. Murray describes the revision process as a period in which “the writer looks forward from the point of view of the creator who is discovering the evolving meaning,” of a work in progress (Crafting 135). There are implications in this statement for both reseeing and restlessness, as Murray advocates a change of viewpoint and an intentional questioning and shaping of meaning. Welch further supports Murray’s concern with the inability of students to revise when she points out that revision is far more than removal of “disorienting” elements of text, such as the conventional and superficial issues described earlier (Welch 2). But she takes the idea further by insisting that disorientations and departures from what appear to be the central elements of a text are of primary significance in helping students understand both the meanings in their texts and nature of meaning in and of itself (Welch 7). Therefore, restlessness must become the defining attribute of any revision process. Further, she contends that revision must begin with “what exceeds, rather than fits into, social mirrors and preplanned narrative. It begins with cultivating a sense of restlessness. . .” (Welch 31). Murray also understands and appreciates this element of excess in the revision process, though he classifies it as something more akin to a sense of surprise. Like
Welch, he believes that significant discoveries of meaning are rarely realized in the mind, but rather in what he calls “the artistic play of revision” (Craft 46).

The notion of evolving meaning is central to restless revision and challenges fallacious beliefs that characterize revision as a more superficial practice. Murray could also be making a case for restlessness in revision when he talks about the importance of what he calls “instructive failure” (Crafting 136). He calls failure the means by which writer’s truly discover what it is they intended to say. When the imagined or perceived notion of what a text is meant to be is not realized in the writing, a kind of restlessness clearly emerges. This sensation can then guide the process of revision in a way consistent with Welch’s theory. Murray also points out how aberrations in text have the power to reveal and point to meaning (Craft 29). This phenomenon is strikingly similar to Welch’s exhortation that rough edges and patches of restlessness are the true invitations to revision and reseeing.

Surprise also emerges as an important component of restlessness in the rewriting process for Murray, Welch, and others. Murray boldly states that “Writers are born at the moment they write what they do not expect and find a potential significance on the page” (Craft XV). Welch extends this idea in warning against thinking that surprise is unwelcome in revision, as “students (or good students) follow a preset course of development, that a character naturally and inevitably unfolds and that we and the texts we write will eventually reach a point of finished perfection” (Welch 31). This narrow view of the revision process leaves little room for the sense of the unexpected that is so crucial in revising honestly and holistically. So when Murray contends that surprise is at the center of the writing process (Craft 46), he is actually pointing out the fact that as
writers, many have been conditioned to fear and distrust the unexpected, and in turn been encouraged to stamp down a sense of restlessness that might have taken them and the text in necessary directions.

Other writers and teachers of writing express similar sentiments to varying degrees. Anne Lamott, a writing teacher and author of several novels as well as the guide *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, explains that writing must mirror life in the aspect of revision. “This is how real life works, in our daily lives as well as in the convalescent home and even at the deathbed, and this is what good writing allows us to notice sometimes. You can see the underlying essence only when you strip away the busyness, and then some surprising connections appear” (Lamott 84). Lamott presumes that writers actively engaged in revision will be allowing themselves to get into a position to be both restless and surprised in order to experience the emergence of meaning.

More established academic voices also support these ideas. Lucy Calkins, in her attempt to break the revision process into stages, identified a sequence of four steps. She contends that writers generally begin with simple addition of material, then move into a refining stage wherein minor changes apart from meaning are made. Third, writers experience a more significant wrestling wherein “the writer was often frustrated because he or she had a vision of what was wanted but was not always able to revise to achieve the desired result” (Ames 18). Ames assertion clearly articulates a writer’s sense of restlessness in a manner consistent with Welch and Murray. What is most revealing in Calkins findings, however, is that the fourth stage following the sense of restlessness was followed by “true, meaningful changes . . . that affected the voice and substance of the
work” (Ames 19). Calkins sequence illustrates that the restless period informs the most meaningful and important of revision.

But perhaps even more compelling as evidence for the importance of Welch’s sense of restlessness as a driving force in the work of any rewriter are the apparent needs that readers bring with them to texts. In advising writers in the revision process, one of Murray’s primary problem diagnoses is a lack of surprise. “The reader reads only what the reader expects. The reader knows what is coming next. There is no challenge, nothing that provokes a thoughtful or emotional reaction from the reader. There is no suspense” (Craft 32). Based on Murray’s statement it would appear that when a writer ignores restlessness and revises a text only to make it unified and predictable, the reader suffers. A sense of restlessness and evidence that the writer has grappled with it extensively in the process is evident in the most readable and engaging of writing in all genres. Dr. John Webster, of the Puget Sound Writing Project and the University of Washington, says it even more succinctly: “As a writer, you must be committed to incompleteness.” This incompleteness is fundamental in giving a reader room to participate and engage in a text, and it can be achieved only if the writer is also committed to revising restlessly.

**Recursiveness and Restlessness**

There is still further evidence for the validity of Welch’s theory in contemporary thought regarding the recursiveness of revision in the process model. While Welch confines her examination of restlessness to the act of revision, its presence and importance can be found throughout the writing process. However, it is first important to understand the assumption that the writing process--despite early notions to the contrary--
is not as linear as it may appear or even as it is often taught. Again, Murray provides valuable insight regarding this truth. “Rewriting begins before you put the first word on paper and continues until you edit the final draft—which may in turn inspire revision” (Crafting 135). Here Murray hints at an important fact: revision and restlessness in essence define the entire writing process. Taken in this light, it is logical to extrapolate that the very thought and act of writing is one predicated on and informed by restlessness. Whether that sense of restlessness is extrinsically created (through an assignment by a teacher, for instance) or intrinsically (by way of a story that had been brewing inside a writer for a number of years) even beginning is in effect a response to a sense of restlessness. Murray again illustrates the recursiveness of revision in the process by asserting that revision should happen continually throughout the writing process, as students should “play with the skills of shifting focus, appealing to different audiences, experimenting with form, manipulating information, restructuring and turning the draft’s voice” (Craft XVII).

Further, Murray’s widely held belief that revision can be categorized into two distinct types—internal and external—provides strong support for both recursiveness and restlessness in writing. He defines internal as the means by which “writers discover and develop what they have to say” and external as what they do “to communicate what they have found they have written to another audience” (Ames 18). He also contends the balance of revision writers engage in is of the internal variety, which would seem again to be more in keeping with the notion of restlessness as a guiding force throughout the writing and rewriting process.
Still others contribute to the conversation regarding recursiveness and how the notion of restlessness informs it. Linda Flower's report on student revision skills and problem diagnosis provides a process model for revision, but it is predicated on the notions of evaluation of issues and selection of strategies—ranging from ignoring and delaying to rewriting and revising—to deal with those issues. What it appears to provide is a model for understanding the stages not just of revision, but the steps advanced writers move through in response to adequately dealing with restlessness in the composing process (Flower 6). Sommers also enters the conversation as she points out that revision is the process by which a writer changes the text to align it with his or her evolving intentions (Lehr 2). She seems to be advancing an understanding of revision as a mode in which the writer experiences a degree of restlessness in the sense of purpose for which they are writing.

Sommers contention that revision is “part of the generative nature of the composing process” is also telling (Gentry 4). If the recursiveness of revision can be assumed, then so must the existence of the driving force of restlessness throughout the process of bringing a text to an audience. And if revision can best be defined as “a complex set of behaviors that occur throughout the act of writing” (Gentry 5) then clearly it owes much of that complexity to the presence of restlessness in the process.

Finally, Anne Lamott offers yet another clue in understanding how not only is the writer restless but the text as an expression of the writer is as well. She likens the latter stages of the revision process to “putting an octopus to bed. I think this perfectly describes the solving of various problems in your final draft. You get a bunch of the octopus’s arms neatly tucked under the covers—that is you’ve come up with a plot,
resolved the conflict between the two main characters, gotten the tone down pat—but two arms are still flailing around . . .” (Lamott 94). Such an image not only cements the idea that the process relies on restlessness and recursion but also that in true revision a sense of restlessness will linger even after a draft must be considered done.

Repressing Restlessness

If as Lamott implies the octopus simply can never be fully tucked in, it would appear that for years teachers of process writing have simply chosen to ignore its presence and have inadvertently taught students to do so as well. By and large, traditional composition instruction methods have conditioned writers to approach revision as a superficial act rather than “the act of rethinking” and reseeing (Lehr 2). Other pedagogists would concur. Donald Graves has long been encouraging instructors to learn to respond to early drafts not as incorrect, but as incomplete (Gentry 99). Even someone as revered as Peter Elbow, who maintains that meaning is not what writers start out with, but end up with, has not had the kind of broad impact on the topic of revision that has fostered widespread fundamental change (Writing 15). While many teachers of writing do agree with these ideas, it would seem that few have embraced them to the degree that they are able to implement them in classrooms and other teaching situations. Therefore, it follows that educators can blame only themselves for the woeful lack of meaningful revision prevalent among student writers.

One possible reason lies in the transition to process writing. When teachers began to understand the virtue of process over product, many embraced the stages zealously. In some cases misapplication of process created a learning climate wherein the process was used to dictate writing, rather than describe and articulate what students were doing. This
in turn led to classrooms in which students were required to revise everything they wrote, a development that was not only unnecessary but detrimental as well (Neman 135). Students in such environments grew to understand revision more as a punishment for not getting a draft right the first time, or as a step to pacify an instructor rather than address any sense of restlessness within. Sommers found that text specific comments on college writers’ papers were not helpful and in fact forced students into a role in which they focused primarily on the instructor’s preferences (Lehr 2). A similar study revealed that 85% of nine and thirteen year old writers who revised and wrote final drafts produced text that was categorized as the same as the initial draft, while the remaining 15% showed as many declines as improvements (Gentry 102). Finally, noted scholar Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that the worst kind of revision is that which “is ordered on the template of convention, smoothed out, straightened, polished, touched up, so that the result is no more than an empty euphony . . . an empty ease of manner, a smooth finish . . . empty of rhetorical complexity and a reduction of semantic polysemy to empty single meanings” (Tremmel 11). This indictment of composition teachers who shy away from restlessness is clear, but it also implies that there is hope that the practice and teaching of writing can be different, and that restlessness can find its place.

Teaching Restlessness

Welch then asserts that the role of the writing teacher is not to intentionally disorient our students, but to help them understand that important revision comes from that unsettled place or places in the process (Welch 32). This understanding however, is obviously not easily accomplished. Elbow’s notion of the developmental model as one that advocates a certain lack of control is also indicative of restlessness. “Let things get
out of hand, let things wander and digress. Though this approach makes for initial panic, my overall experience with it is increased control” (Elbow 32). Admittedly, this picture of restlessness is somewhat difficult to manage on a large scale, and may not be appropriate for many contexts. However, a number of writers and teachers have pointed out best practices that in fact capitalize on a sense of restlessness and honor the spirit of Elbow’s idea. To this end, it is first important to understand that revision will not be successful unless teachers provide intervention by teaching revision processing and skills, offer freedom to students, and finally be flexible with times, expectations and forms (Neman 145).

First, intervention can take a variety of forms. Barry Lane, long a proponent for direct instruction of revision, predicates much of what he suggests for teaching revision on what might be considered restlessness. The activities in his books certainly rely on students to dig into and articulate what works and what doesn’t, in order to pay attention to a sense of dissatisfaction that will ultimately lead them to clearly understand that writing is rewriting. The tested and successful activities are contingent on students reveling and taking strength from that sense of restlessness as they reenter text. A number of other established practices will help students in these areas as well. Primary among these is the writing conference, long an established tool for creating writers who revise.

The writing conference, though interpreted widely and manifested in a variety of forms, has some key identifying characteristics that establish connections with the ideas of restlessness. Whatever the exact form, conferences are powerful tools for individualizing teaching, providing immediate support to writers, demonstrating the
impact of writing on a reader, and providing expertise (Neman 159). Most follow the
general template Beth Neman describes in her book *Teaching Students to Write*. Steps
include reading the text, dispelling any sense of anxiety a student might have (or assuring
them that the restlessness they might be experiencing is natural and important),
identifying the strengths of the writing, deciding on a problem area to address, and
developing a plan (Neman 159-165). It is telling that conferences provide a powerful
venue for articulating and managing the restlessness associated with strong writing and
meaningful revision. No other tool provides the structure, support, and venue for the
exploration and handling of restlessness, both from the reader’s and writer’s perspectives.

However, there are obvious traps to avoid with the writing conference that in fact
can interfere with the shaping influence of restlessness. Sometimes, students can be
overwhelmed by that sense of unrest and rely too heavily on the other participant in the
conference (be it teacher or student) to fix the problems. Teachers must therefore
carefully teach students to grapple with that sense of restlessness, and make decisions and
judgements about the text themselves. Murray concurs, in his definition of the effective
writer as one who “courts and appreciates the unexpected, the unplanned, the
contradictory, the surprise” (Craft 46). Conferences can be powerful arenas for
cultivating students who fit this description. Further evidence suggests that conferences
and other direct teaching strategies such as mini-lessons result in students who command
more “thoughtful, sophisticated writing habits” (Lehr 2). Ultimately, students will not
learn to deal with and take strength from restlessness unless they are shown how to do so
by instructors who make use of tools such as these.
Also important in allowing restlessness to take root in the writing and revising of student writers is flexibility. Instructors must create classroom climates that allow students to engage fully and honestly in the process of revision, which often means altering expectations. Extra time to work and revise assignments encourages students to engage in more active revision (Lehr 3), suggesting that the longer students have to experience and be shaped by their own senses of restlessness, the more sophisticated the final product will be. Making sure that publication of certain pieces is part of the writing process will also encourage students to revise more extensively (Lehr 1) arguably because knowing that a real audience will read the writing intensifies the innate sense of restlessness and allows it to fully do its work in a student. When a writer is moved to revise by raising the stakes with a real audience, it amplifies restless feelings and concerns with a text. What will result, according to Donald Murray, is that “the act of revision will produce it’s own excitement and motivation: we will read what we did not expect to write” (Craft 46).

Writing Restlessly

Finally, the emergence of a relatively new form of writing holds incredible potential for helping students revise restlessly: the multigenre essay. Multigenre writing is defined by relatively separate pieces unified around a single theme, but expressed in a variety of modes. Elbow advocated for the practice early on when he wrote of cooking as an interaction between modes.

“Allow your writing to fall into poetry and then back into prose; from informal to formal; from personal to impersonal; first person to third person; fiction, non-fiction; empirical, a priori. When it starts to change modes on you, don’t shrink back and stop it. Let it go and develop itself in that mode. Even if it seems crazy. It will show you things about your
material and help it cook, develop, and grow . . . each way of writing will bring out new aspects of the material” (Elbow 54).

Such an exhortation was revolutionary at its time, and in Elbow’s context meant to remain relatively confined to the early stages of the process. Since then several have championed the validity of the form for a variety of reasons. Tom Romano, perhaps the most vocal and accomplished representative of multigenre, contends multigenre is superior in its ability to help students think and learn deeply about a topic. “Good writing, regardless of the mode of discourse, causes writers to think. That thinking involves a productive dialectic between analysis and synthesis” (Romano 6). Romano goes on to assert that multigenre writing affords greater opportunities for students to think at those higher levels, and to get there with a relative degree of independence.

Beyond this advantage, multigenre also encourages revision and restlessness in unparalleled ways. If revision is truly a means to resee information, ideas and knowledge, the different forms of discourse in multigenre make this process explicit by employing the varying lenses of exposition, fiction, poetry and others. It also requires students to understand specific facets of a single unifying idea. Further, multigenre handily fulfills the notion of depth of insight versus breadth of coverage that is currently redefining educational practice. When students go deeply into a topic for a multigenre report, they are not only learning about the specific topic but they are also developing skills that will serve them as learners, thinkers and writers in other contexts. Finally, when students are engaged with and captured by a topic in the way multigenre allows them to be, they are far more likely to practice meaningful and intentional revision.

Key to the success of multigenre is a variety of fully valid voices in a single work (Tremmel 5). The fact that these voices and expressions might seem to compete with
each other at times is a perfect expression of the restlessness that a writer should feel and explore as he or she develops such a complex and challenging work. Further, multigenre results in the development of a writer who is “less an absolute ruler and more a mediator or orchestral conductor who while not abdicating his or her authorial responsibility, executes that responsibility by maximizing the dialogue among voices” (Tremmel 6). This truth can clearly be read as a process wherein those voices themselves are restless and competitive, and meaning scrambles for a place among them. The writer who chooses to engage in multigenre work will not only test and improve revision skills, but also learn to listen to restlessness.

Undoubtedly, the experience can be transformative for the writer in learning to revise restlessly. Romano provides this account from his own experience with work revising in the multigenre framework: “I say transacted instead of interacted, because not only did the poem change, but I too changed from writing it. I saw part of my life more clearly. Synthesizing that adolescent experience enabled me to analyze it” (Romano 34). The author illustrates the way in which revising in a multigenre context can not only lead to a level of sophistication in understanding the topic at hand but also foster critical thinking and self-awareness that signify higher order learning.

In truth, every part of writing a multigenre paper forces students to revise and experience restlessness. The fact that a variety of voices and modes must be aligned into a larger work not only requires extensive revision, but also makes explicit the restlessness that precludes that revision. When students learn to manage those voices, they are learning to manage restlessness as well, learning to understand that “incorporated consciousnesses refuse to be silenced by the author’s pursuit of a unifying idea”
(Tremmel 6) and that the resultant text will be richer for the struggle and existence of such diversity. In fact, multigenre writing and its strengths are pedigreed in Bakhtin and his scholarship of Dostoevsky. Tremmel interprets his analysis and thought eloquently:

“Multigenre writing recognizes the echoes of many voices and uses these for the deliberate purpose of exploring a particular issue, theme or subject. Words in a multigenre paper do not conclude anything definitively, but invite the conversation to continue” (2) as all restless revision is wont to do.
Works Cited


Restless Work, Draft Two

I can dig
A deep scar across the surface of an idea
An open sore in the side of a mountain
And read the idea within like something being excavated

But reseeing

Is like a lump of coal
Ideas pressed
Packed down
Compacted into language

Pressure, time, thought,
The heat of process does its work
To birth that
Rough, raw diamond

I can take that one, single rough raw stone
Find a crack that lets me in
And cut a face
And cut a face
And cut a face

Moving myself around it
Each tiny deliberate cut
A poem
A story
A conversation

That lets that idea
In all its beauty
Complexity
And flaws
Come shining through.
A Restless Conversation

This conversation took place at the midpoint of the Puget Sound Writer’s Project at the University of Washington, on July 21, 2004. Martha Daman, Anna Ayers, Amy Young, Colleen Carlson, Shawn Simpson, Eleanor Johnson, Claire Gearen, and Noah Barfield are all educators and writers in western Washington State.

Jen: Why is revision so hard? Or why is it so hard to teach?

Martha: I think it’s difficult for students because in their minds when they’ve finished the draft, and they are in such a habit of chunking things and finishing them and forgetting about them, asking them to come back and take another look at it is something a little foreign to them, at least the students that I have.

Anna: I think one of the reasons revision is really difficult for kids because we as educators have really trained them to look for the right answer, and if they write it down and they have worked hard on it and you tell them that it needs work, suddenly its not the right answer and they’re just blown away by that. It’s like “Oh! But I thought that’s what you wanted me to write. And I think in school, we really end up getting kids to write what we think rather than what they think.

Amy: I have two ideas. One is: I know when I write, I revise as I go along on the computer, so how do I teach that? And if I’m not sitting there next to them and don’t see what they’re doing on paper, maybe they’re revising anyways and we don’t know it because it’s just not the way we’re teaching them. And another thing, I don’t remember ever being taught how to revise a paper. And I know that how I teach is how I was
taught, so I don’t necessarily really know how to do it. I have a couple of activities I do, and I end up pretty much leaving it because I don’t know very much about it.

**Eleanor:** I also have the problem with some of my students getting bored with their papers or their topics, and they don’t want to look at it two or three or four times. They’re tired of it and want to move on to something new.

**Martha:** The other thing that I was thinking of as you guys were talking is that revision is difficult *for me* when I’ve been working on a piece because I have a hard time seeing things that aren’t working because I put them in there so naturally that I miss things. Another thing I find is difficult is self revision—it seems to get really difficult at a certain point in the writing process.

**Amy:** Kind of when I write a paper, I try to plan on doing it a week or two ahead of time so I can go back a week later after it’s out of my head and then reread it, and I don’t know if I do that with kids. I don’t know if I give them enough time to separate themselves from a paper.

**Anna:** With the intermediate kids I’m most familiar with, when we’re working really hard with writing process, we say “the first day, you’re doing a prewrite, the second day you do a rough draft, third day, you’re going to revise, which means they go in and change the punctuation and spelling, fourth day you’re going to edit and they go, “Oh. I already did that, and the fifth day, publish which means they have just done a neater copy of the thing they did the first time. And among all that process, there is never any real conversation about what is it in the writing that is good. What is it that gives me message? So there’s that whole piece about not encouraging kids in conversation about writing. Just letting them ask questions or asking them those evocative questions, to get
them to think “Maybe I could have said this more clearly,” or “I wanted you to know that the dog was black and white.” I don’t think there’s enough conversation around revision. I think it’s something we assign, but you have to get in there and wallow around with them.

Amy: I guess that goes back to what our writing groups are. It’s new to me to sit around and have people say, “I thought, I wonder, I felt, I heard.” If I had kids do that then they’d say, “I didn’t say that,” or “That’s not the meaning,” and then it gives them something solid to go back and revise instead of me giving them a sheet and saying “Did you look through all this stuff?”

(A chorus of agreement follows.)

Anna: How do you actually model revision unless you take one paper and you go through that stupid revision checklist that they give you for the WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning) where it says something about Ideas and Content—lots of details, lots and lots of supporting details? Then to the kids, you say, “Now go back and look at your paper and look for supporting details,” because revision is too often looked at as “fix the whole paper.” So what exactly do you want to look at your paper for? How do you want to determine what to fix? And what questions do you ask yourself as a writer to do that? So again, modeling the think aloud, that scaffolding, so that they’re thinking about revision . . .

Colleen: And I’ve written example essays where obviously I leave in stuff and then I say, “Okay, now what about this?” and I do it on the transparency and the overhead so they can see what I did have and then, you know we brainstorm together and I write in what I was thinking, and so that’s how I model revision. And I’ll go through a lot of
different papers, but it's always such a short thing. But, um, John Reese, one of the other English teachers has the computer set up where he pulls this essay up and he's got peoples essay and they start taking out stuff, and I don't know if I can do that because I don't know if I can remember what was there, and is it that much better?

Noah: I was just thinking about that exact same thought, about my own writing process because I will compose on a computer, but I often need to revise on paper because I can draw a line through something on paper and I still have it, but if I delete it on the computer, its gone.

Colleen: Yeah, and I can't keep track.

Anna: How many of you have to print out what you write in order to revise? (Five of the eight participants raise their hands).

Anna: I have to hold it in my hand.

Amy: That's a different stage in the writing process.

Martha: Me too. When I'm writing, what I found what I was doing with the process paper and I'll go up to the top and read the first paragraphs when I'm just starting to see what's evolving as my focus as I'm writing, and then after I've written a significant amount of text, then I just go with my thought. Then I've figured out more for myself what it is that I'm talking about. And then I go back and print it out and do the next kind of revision, but I'm revising on the computer as I go.

Colleen: And I do that too, except that I am convinced that my students are not sophisticated enough that they can do that. That they can just go. I'm going, "Get your outline, get your focus—"

Amy: Well how'd you learn to do that?
Anna: I just got to tell you that I could never as a student when I was in high school and college, I could never write from an outline. (Several agree with this.) I have to freewrite, I’m not an organized thinker, so I freewrite then go through and figure out the things I think are really key, and then I put them in an organizational pattern. If you make me start from a set organization, I’m done.

Noah: Whereas I’m the opposite. So I teach my kids these freewriting techniques as part of the writing process and I feel like a big phony because I’m a very logical thinker who outlines everything.

Anna: So I guess the big question is, how do we make space in our room for all those different kinds of learners?

Jen: That’s a great question. And that feeling of being a phony, like you’re wanting the kids to make very explicit on the page to show you how they’re thinking and what is changing, but yet we don’t do that. I guess I’d like to probe that a little bit more.

Eleanor: We do do that as teachers, so what I’ve found to be really effective with high school students is I have a source book of drafts from papers at a community college and the kids get the biggest kick out of reading these papers. First of all, just the idea of “oh my gosh, they wrote like this and they’re in college?” Right away the interest is piqued that way, but then to have them each in groups work on what they would do if they were going to have a conference with that writer. And all of a sudden it takes the pressure off—they’re not embarrassed, it’s not their writing, it’s someone who’s older than they are, and they have fun with it.

Martha: That’s a great idea.

Eleanor: It’s the only positive thing I can think of to introduce revision.
Anna: You can also put up a piece of your writing—just a prewrite that you’ve done, and say, “What’s missing, what didn’t you like?” I’ve done that with kids and they like it and have fun with it.

Colleen: Model, model, model.

Anna: I think the other thing is that we’ve tried to proceduralize revision so much—it’s like we have to grade revision. It’s even on our report cards in our districts . . .

Martha: Yeah, it’s on our rubrics.

Anna: How do you grade it? And since we have to grade we have to tell them what it is. The writing process is different for every writer, but unless you write, you don’t know that. So maybe the only way to get them to be revisionists is to immerse them in writing.

Martha: And to give them enough of the experiences like we’ve had where we spend time creating and generating ideas and then give them time to flip through—I noticed that’s what I’ve been doing. I flip back through my journal and go “Oh, you know I think I want to change this a little bit,” and then the revision actually comes out naturally. Because that’s what I’ve always done—the real lockstep kind of approach and it doesn’t always work.

Amy: I know this is so obvious and you all know it, but writing for myself is one thing, but then knowing I’m going to be sharing with three people in the class, I’m like, “Damn it, this has to be better!” (Laughter)

Jen: So that question of audience, a real audience with some stakes—be they high or low—can really motivate revision.

Anna: One of the books on the cart, I don’t remember which one it is, says that one of the effective things to do with kids with revision is that that whole idea of audience is one
of the most crucial pieces because unless they know it's a real audience, if you’re the
only audience they have, they’re going to write teacher talk. But if they’re writing it for a
magazine, a letter to the editor, other students—


Anna: Whatever, the whole idea of audience really pushes revision.

Noah: The challenge for me is finding an audience that they care about. Some kids will
respond really well if they have to share it in front of their peers, and some kids don’t
care because they can be sloppy with their friends.

Anna: I think there’s a difference though between sharing with groups and sharing with
their friends. If you’re in a small enough community that might be hard to separate, but
it’s really crucial they don’t choose their own groups.

Colleen: My seniors in College Prep English, they self-select where they sit, but the
room was packed, but the generally went to two sides of the room. So after a couple of
practice essays and the scholarship notebook, they came in with the first draft of the next
essay. I collected them all, took this half and gave it to this half and took this half and
gave it to this half, and their reaction was like “Ohh!” These were 18 year old kids, but
they couldn’t say “Here’s my paper, Suzy, can you read like you’ve done for the last
eight years?”

Amy: I do that in this classroom and we’re adults! (Laughter)

Colleen: True. But I was really surprised at their reaction to having somebody clear
across the room outside their peer group read the paper, but it worked out great. But it
was uncomfortable, and it got into that idea of audience.

Claire: I’m curious about your district’s grading of revision—
Anna: Me too! (Laughter)

Claire: Just, what exactly is on the report card?

Anna: It’s just the process and lists the stages . . .

Claire: So do they get a grade for their ability to prewrite?

Anna: Well, basically teachers are getting together at the grade level and saying “What would this look like as a process grade at this particular grade level?” So they’ve been really thoughtful about how they do it, but they keep coming back with “I can grade that they did a prewrite, a first draft, I can tell whether or not they’ve revised it or just edited by looking at the two different stages, I can see the final draft, but do I know that they used a solid writing process? No.” So I have to assume if they have all those pieces then they did the process. However, we do have students who do the final product and then go back and recreate the pieces at the beginning in order to do well with the process piece because they write naturally.

Jen: So is what they do there sufficient? That’s the question that really challenges what we do—

Anna: If they’re decent, if they’re well-rounded—they won’t be perfect, of course—but how do we teach them that revision is something other than fix that, do a list—

Amy: . . . that it’s not punishment—

Anna: Yeah.

Jen: Then what is it?

Amy: It’s getting a better paper.

Anna: And it’s thinking about your writing. It’s really sort of being present and involved with your own work.
**Jen:** What are the advantages to that? To a kid who says “I can write a paper and it’s okay, so leave me alone,” what’s the advantage? Why are we telling them revision is a worthwhile thing to do?

**Noah:** I’ve looked at all the checklist and rubrics that I do, but the biggest question that I always face is do we ever get to a spot as a reader where I say “Huh? I don’t get this.” If so, that’s a red flag. And then I tell the kids, set the rubrics aside, and if at any point something comes up you don’t understand, then make a big circle because that’s a spot the writer needs to make some changes.

**Martha:** I guess it also becomes a question of “What is the purpose of revision? Is it revision for revision’s sake, or is it revision for a purpose?” Like a breakdown in communication that makes you go back in.

**Anna:** So, like, what makes you guys revise? You guys are writers, and writers are writers no matter what age they are. So what makes us revise?

**Martha:** I want to create better images. My initial drafts—I want to improve the language, I want to make it more vivid.

**Noah:** I’m more with Amy there. If I’m sharing it with my friends, I want it to look good, or if I’m taking a class, I want a better grade.

**Claire:** Revision is just the way I write. It’s always been the way I write. In high school, we weren’t graded on revision, we were taught revision, and I developed as a writer who revises.

**Anna:** How did you learn revision in high school? How was this taught?

**Claire:** Peter Elbow’s methods, the writing group method, the teacherless writing groups. In any case, I grade revision in my classes. I started doing this last year because
we were given more students and had a higher workload and just needed to make sure they were doing it.

**Colleen:** So how do you do that?

**Claire:** I put revision as one of the five criteria of the final paper, and put it right there on the rubric and stated what revision of that particular assignment should look like and what grade I would attach to different levels of quality for that revision. And I’m sure people say, “Well not every writer does revision in the same way, or uses revision,” the vast majority of people do revise and most professional writers do revise, with very few exceptions.

**Noah:** Claire, looking at your point of grading revisions from a pragmatist’s standpoint, I have so many students, I won’t grade revision. I will have a writer’s workshop, I’ll have the rubric on the overhead, I’ll have groups, I’ll give points for a draft and then I’ll give them a week when they can kind of see me after school, before school, or during lunch, but I put the onus on them to seek the help in the writer’s workshop, because I don’t have the time to grade both revision and a final draft.

**Colleen:** (to Claire) is that what you mean though? Grading a revision like grading a draft?

**Claire:** I grade the draft and the final and they each have separate rubrics, and on the final is a line that says revision.

**Colleen:** So they can see the grade for revision.

**Claire:** Yeah, and if they forget to attach the draft, they don’t get any points for revision because I can’t see what they’ve done.
Jen: So you’re scanning to see if they responded to comments from reviewers, if they made significant changes . . .

Claire: Yeah.

Noah: Something like that, after we get the grade, I give them one shot for ten points of improvement. They have to turn in the original, the revised draft and a cover letter which details exactly what did.

Claire: With the writing assignments students need to complete to get credit in the course, in freshman and sophomore language arts classes, I make sure all students have access to a computer by going to the Mac lab, and before we go, if it’s between a draft and a final, they have to make up a plan of action for what they’re going to do in the Mac lab to revise.

Jen: It sounds like some of the things we’re hearing is that there’s quite a bit of parallelism in revision for a lot of us as far as what motivates and makes us go back in and what we do when we revise, and it also seems there are some connections in how we try to encourage students to do that revision. I’m just wondering if there are other things you do that make kids go to those places where revision is most authentic, or most like what we practice as writers, because we said earlier that a lot of us tend to teach kids to revise in ways that we don’t. Is there anything else?

Shawn: Some of the tools I’ve used with ninth graders have been giving them tools to revise their word choice, and sentence structure. On the overhead, I’ll highlight all verbs—be verbs, action verbs—then I challenge them to use the vocabulary. Kids writing and word choice improves and they gain more confidence when they know how to use the dictionary and thesaurus more. And the other thing is highlighting sentence
starts, and I just ask them to identify word and sentence patterns. When they have those
two tools right there, they can go out on their own; a lot of kids will go back and do that
revision, because they want to be more successful.

Anna: I think one of the key things in getting kids to revise is that they have a topic they
want to write about. Even if it is a research paper, somehow, they have to have a
personal connection with that topic—they may not be able to choose the genre or the
bigger topic—but somehow, giving them choices is important to get them to revise.

Shawn: Another thing I’ve used in the past is that I give incompletes. They don’t want
to get an “I.” Or a “not there yet.” I also pass out those models kids write that are great
and ask the kids to identify what makes the piece great. And I publish on the wall—
that’s a big deal, they want that praise. Having that authentic audience and publishing
really effects.

Anna: So what about those kids who really struggle? Do they envision themselves as
maybe getting published or do they separate themselves and say, “Not going to happen.”

Shawn: I try to get everybody on the wall, for any part of the writing process, or genre.

Anna: So you’re really intentional about who gets on the wall.

Shawn: Yeah. I make sure I get everybody on there at some point.

Noah: I do wall poetry, very similar, and everybody gets on the wall, but some get on
more than others

Colleen: “Some pigs are more equal than others. . .”

Noah: Sure, but it gives us a chance to say, “Hey who really is doing good poetry this
week?”
Jen: One last question—I found a text by a woman named Nancy Welch, and the book is called *Getting Restless*, and she makes a case for the most meaningful revision being that which sort of emerges out of places that are just bothersome. And I heard some echoes of that earlier, and she points out that students have some pretty negative attitudes about revising, that is more a slash and burn approach to their work instead of really wrestling with it, and sometimes have a too single-minded approach to unity and clarity. So do you think there’s anything to this, or is it just a crock?

Noah: I think there is something to that, but I also think it depends on the maturity of the writer. If a student knows herself well enough as a writer to look at a paper and say “I know that this section of my paper is not working, then that’s going to drive them as a reviser. But if they don’t, or they think that all of their writing is bad. Or what’s even worse is if they have a section that they think is really, really good (groans and affirmations from the rest of the group) and it’s really bad.

Jen: Great point.

Shawn: One of the things I think kids have a really hard time doing is revealing truth in their writing. Having specific detail, and that’s where I find they grow most in their writing, is in revising those specific details.

Anna: There’s a great little book that has an example of that called *Twilight Comes Twice*. It takes just a teeny little moment in time, and makes it into an event. It takes one moment, maybe fifteen minutes of a kid’s life, and makes an entire picture book out of it. And it’s just absolutely impressive how a writer can do that, and it makes it so beautiful because it’s a picture book. But just that you can take that small detail—same
thing as the slow motion writing—and take it down to its finest details and really create an ambiance in your writing.

Noah: But when do you teach kids how to generalize, because that’s a skill they need and when do you teach them to create that rich detail?

Anna: Doesn’t that drag you right back to audience? Are you looking for interesting details and a heart-felt moment, or are you looking for information?

Shawn: Even an intro can start globally and then go more specific.

Anna: And that goes back to teaching kids what an essential question is, or what a good thesis statement looks like, because if you have that narrow focus, then you’ll get that detail.

Jen: Is that part of maturity that Noah was talking about? Seeing those connections and knowing when to make those decisions?

Anna: I think it can be started really young. I might not talk about thesis statements when they’re first graders, but I can ask them what the one thing they want the reader to know at the end. “These kinds of bugs are my favorites . . .” what’s that one kernel of great knowledge that should come out, and whose your audience?

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That question is tough to answer for this piece of writing, but the discussion and ideas were certainly rich. It also feels very much like the way revision and multigenre were described in my research as management of voices, rather than arriving at a final solution. And like all good writing—especially multigenre—it invites the conversation to continue.
Slow Motion Writing: A Lesson in Restless Revision

Overview

The lesson that follows is one I teach with my ninth grade composition classes during our memoir writing unit. After reading and journaling about self-selected memoirs, the students work to produce a phase memoir, with pieces representing a variety of modes. At the midpoint of the narrative writing phase, I guide them through this activity that I adapted from a presentation by Barry Lane. I find that one of my greatest challenges is to convince students that revision is the writing process, and this is an activity that helps them understand and make significant changes to drafts they had considered complete because it capitalizes on a sense of restlessness inherent in the process for so many students. I am also continually amazed to find students who return to my elective classes in later years and who still use this valuable revision tool for a variety of writing tasks.

Slow Motion Writing is also part of a series of lessons I do called “Trick or Trait.” Each Wednesday, we spend some time as a class looking at a specific revision strategy or at how a specific writing trait is indicative of vibrant, interesting writing. This lesson works very well for ideas and content, but there is a secondary focus on organization as well. Its strengths lie in asking students to go to places in a draft that seem unexplored or hurried over and draw out purposeful detail, as well as using film as a hook to engage students and as something to attach the learning to.

Objectives

☐ To show students are authorities on their own stories and how they are told
To allow students to revise from a position of restlessness

To equip students with a tool for re-entering a draft or piece of writing

To understand how Ideas/Content and Organization can be helpful in revising a piece of writing

Activities

1. Prior to the lesson, students will have written drafts of their narrative essays. I do encourage them to at least apply the basic story model as a test to make sure the story they are telling is both limited enough in scope to tell fully, and has a beginning, middle and end structure. The prewriting is often a lesson in selecting and focusing. (Anne Lamott has two chapters in *Bird by Bird*, “School Lunches” & “One Inch Picture Frames,” that work well in helping kids understand this concept.

2. Students are asked to get out prewrites, drafts, and extra blank paper at the beginning of class.

3. As an entry task, I generally ask kids to describe a favorite film scene in which slow motion is used. As they do, they need to answer one of two questions. Either, “Why do you think the filmmaker chose to use the slow motion in that scene?” or “What effect did it have on you as a viewer.” I usually give 3-4 minutes for this warm up.

4. After the warm up, I ask the students to name the films they wrote about. I list them on the board for about two minutes. This step is not necessary, but I find it
gets the kids communicating after the writing time and builds some needed energy for later.

5. I stop listing and ask to kids to share their responses to the prompt question in general terms. They don’t need to go into detail about the film, rather focus on the why or the effect. Students usually quickly arrive at something like the following responses:
   a. They want us to pay attention to something.
   b. They want to make it more dramatic
   c. They want to make it longer
   d. They want us to see something we couldn’t otherwise see
   e. They want something silly to be funnier because they treat it seriously

6. This is a great time to stop and talk about tone (or touch on voice) as we are hinting at how the subject and genre really affect the presentation of the details. They need to keep this in mind in a few minutes when they begin writing.

7. I then show a clip from *The Natural*, beginning with at the 11:32 mark and ending at the 14:41 mark. Before I do, I give a brief background and ask the kids to think about two things as they read this text:
   a. Why does the director use slow motion at this point in the story?
   b. What can you see in the slow motion that you couldn’t see before?

The clip itself features Robert Redford’s character, Roy Hobbs, as he first proves his mettle against a Babe Ruth like braggart in a wager. It is the first of many climatic moments in the story.

8. After the clip, we discuss their responses to the above points.
9. Finally we are ready to write. Ask the students to revisit the draft they wrote for today’s class circling the paragraph or line in which they explain the climax for the story. Often I tell them this is the moment that makes the story worth telling.

10. When they have that spot picked out, I ask them to note how much time they devoted to it in the draft, and also to think about how long the moment actually took in real life.

11. I then let them know that we are going to write in slow motion. Just like a DVD player, their brains can rewind, play, pause and show a clip in slow motion. Their task is to use that tool and slow down the moment that makes the story worth telling. Some will wonder if this means they should write slowly, but I always assure them that it means just the opposite. We do what I call a “burst” where they must write continuously and with momentum for a sustained period of time. We discuss for a few minutes how they might translate to words some of the very sensory details of the moment they have chosen to explode. I find it helpful to remind the students that the slow motion tends to adapt itself to the tone of the piece.

12. If the students are still confused at this point, I sometimes share my example. If they seem ready to write, I like to turn them loose.

13. The students write for 9 minutes. I encourage them as they are working to keep the pencil moving across the page and not to worry about how things are sounding. I usually circulate the first part of the writing time to make sure they are all on board, and then write a bit toward the end.
14. When the timer goes off, the students stop and most are amazed that what they just wrote in nine minutes is as long as the draft they started with. I ask them to read over the draft, and underline/mark what they are surprised by. This is a good way to make the first approach at a burst non-threatening.

15. I then ask the students to read the moment in the original draft and the slow motion aloud to a partner. The role of the partner is to listen and identify at least one phrase or image that made the moment come to life more for them as an audience.

16. We usually come back and have a few minutes of whole group discussion and hear a couple of examples from volunteers as we revisit the reasons for writing in slow-motion to make sure that we met our objectives.

17. Finally, we talk about some possible places where all or part of these pieces of writing might work well in the draft. Some will choose to put them at the logical point of the climax in the story’s progression, others will find that it actually works better as a flash-forward lead to hook the reader, some end up doing some combination of the two. This can be a partnered activity if time permits.

18. For homework, the students are to revise the draft, imbedding all or part of the slow motion.

**Equipment and Materials**

- Film clip
- Drafts to revise
- White board, projector, etc for recording student responses
Sample Essay

The Polisher

I’ve never been lucky with small appliances. From electric shavers (ouch) to mixers (don’t ask), I seem to find ways to inspire subsequent versions of the same product to later carry various warnings on the packaging. But the shoe polisher incident lives in infamy as the most extreme example of this flaw in my character.

It all began when my father was given another of his strangely bizarre Christmas presents from his employees. One year, they all chipped in and graced him with a hand held electric shoe polisher. Most of the things they gave him were useless—my father sold riding lawnmowers from a grungy warehouse and had little use for shined shoes. But my dad was always too nice or lazy to return the presents so we inherited them for our own fun. The shoe polisher was sleek and black with a giant rotating brush at one end. It looked a lot like my electric toothbrush or one of those scrubbing bubbles from the bathroom cleaner commercial—only dirtier. My two sisters and I immediately figured out the perfect use for it: tickle torture. So after trying it out on tummies, toes, I got what seemed to be a great idea.

But it wasn’t. I thought that since it was so fun everywhere else, it would feel great on my hair. Katy refused to let me stick the polisher on her head, so I stupidly did it myself. A few minutes later after it was all over, my mom was cutting the machine out of the twisted mass of hair and I was wiping away the tears.

I wore braids for six months to cover the silver-dollar sized bald spot on my noggin. I was desperate to show off my premature middle age to impress all my friends
at school, but my mother knew better than to let me brag about how stupid I really was. All in all, I learned two important lessons: never mess with electric shoe polishers no matter how innocent they look and always test things out on your helpless, smaller baby sister before trying them on yourself.

*And the resulting slow motion . . .*

. . . My two sisters and I immediately figured out the perfect use for it: tickle torture. So after trying it out on tummies, toes, I got what seemed to be a great idea.

But it wasn’t such a great idea as I was soon to find out. After trying to convince my little sister Katy to stick it on her head (she had grown wise to my schemes by this point), I plopped the giant brush squarely on top of my auburn curls. My sisters watched in horror as my brave smile melted into a look of anguish and terror as the brush wrapped itself in my hair and began to smoke and growl. I began to scream as the worst pain—worse than the time my grandmother tried to brush sand burrs out of my hair—coursed from my scalp and through my body. My sisters crept slowly backward as my mother moved over to respond to my cries. The funny thing was that she didn’t even hurry; she sort of just sauntered over with this “What has she done now” look on her face. When I think about it, I saw that look a lot growing up. But at that time, I could only scream and point at the monster trying to twist my brain out of my skull like some weird creature from a *StarTrek* rerun. There was no escape, no relief, as the machine ground deeper into my mind and hair began to pop out from the roots. I knew I would never see Disneyland, never tie my own shoes on the first try, never fight with Jana for the chair in front of the TV again because there was no way anyone could save me this
time. But as I mused on the impending loss of so many six-year-old pleasures, my mother all-too-calmly reached over and unplugged the polisher and began to assess the damage.

I wore braids for six months to cover the silver-dollar sized bald spot on my noggin. I was desperate . . .
Revision Review

Thanks for tuning into the Writer's Radio Theater. This week we've a full slate of topics to discuss, ranging from the problems of computes in composition to publishing your work. But first, let's talk revision. We all know rewriting is an important part of any writer's practice. Recently, writers and teachers of rewriting the world over have jumped on the bandwagon of the 6+1 Trait Writing. This model purports to provide students and instructors with a set of vocabulary and identifiers to talk about and revise writing. These elements include Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, and Presentation. The criteria are used to help students and teachers find a common language with which to analyze prose and revise it accordingly. While many teachers celebrate the strength of the model, it is not without its detractors. Here with an analysis of the first of the traits is Abel Rider, our resident opinionated critic.

Ideas are at the heart of any good piece of writing, and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory is justified in placing them at the top of the batting order of their 6+1 Trait Writing Model team. Any piece of writing worth reading (or in fact writing) should be about something. And this model is the surest way to make sure that it is.

The description operates on a scale sliding from one (being the lowest) to five (being the highest). The differences they describe are significant and they do an ample job of enumerating the distinguishing factors of a piece of writing weak on ideas to a strong one. Theoretically, this framework should be useful in both assessing and revising, as teachers are not only encouraged to grade using the language and criteria of Ideas, but students are encouraged to revise their work according to its descriptions.
In its effort to manage the beast that is writing, and by extension, rewriting, some would say the great minds at NWREL have risked neutering the writing and rewriting process of its most important ingredient—restlessness. While it teeters on the edge of the formulaic, I conclude that Nancy Welch would approve.

Its description of a strong piece of writing, the creators of the model write that such a paper is “clear and focused. It holds the reader’s attention. Relevant anecdotes and details enrich the central theme.” It goes on to describe such a piece of writing as one that relies on a narrow, manageable topic, original ideas, anticipating and answering readers’ questions, and actually contains some insight. It would seem that such a paragon of meaning, originality, and insight would be the result of a writer who has grappled extensively with his or her expression. Each of these do in fact describe an excellent piece of writing, regardless of mode or genre, but surprisingly, a look at the second set of descriptors reveals the model’s true strengths.

In contrast to the description for the five paper, the three identifies the writer as the problem area. “The writer is beginning to define the topic, even though development is still basic or general.” The remainder of the attributes of a three parallel those of a five, but in appropriately subdued terms. On the whole, it would seem that the idea of meaning here is in an emergent state. If one were to apply Welch’s philosophy, this is most certainly where the notion of restlessness would dwell, both for reader and writer. In this evolution of a piece of writing, not many of the questions have been answered, and quite possibly a few of the important questions have not even been asked. Ideas may be clear, but they are likely also bland and too general. All of the descriptors at this level of writing would strongly suggest that such a writer experienced sensations of restlessness,
but chose to ignore them (or was ill-equipped to deal with them) and created a piece of writing that holds but a shadow of the meaning it could. Further, the ignoring or subjection of that restlessness taints the experience for the reader as well. They may understand the paper, but it does little to say anything fresh or engaging about the topic because the writer was incapable of or unwilling to grapple with the sense of restlessness that informs healthy, mature revision.

If a stage three paper is one in which restless still has work to accomplish, the stage one is an example of one in which restlessness has only just begun. This paper, aptly summarized, “As yet, the paper has no clear sense of purpose or central theme. To extract meaning from the text, the reader must make inferences based on sketchy or missing details,” needs serious attention. The description goes on to charge such a text with “searching for a topic,” “limited information and inadequate length,” “simple restatements of the topic,” and more. Most telling however in terms of restlessness is the last descriptor: “The text may be repetitious, or may read like a collection of disconnected, random thoughts with no discernable point.” This is an apt description of the very early urgings of restlessness that follow not long after the onset of that unrest which spawns the act of writing in the first place. What one might conclude—as a writer, teacher, student—is that in order to jump from a one to a five, the restlessness must be addressed and explored extensively as a means for revision, not as something to be excised out and removed. That would seem to make the difference between staying on topic, and discovering insight, between a middling three and a vaunted five.

Thus, NWREL has done much for writers everywhere with its insightful analysis of this particular trait. I’ll be back next week to see if they can do it again when I review
organization—which, by the way, I understand to be quite the complicated little number.

If this installment is any indication, I’m very much looking forward to the sequel.
6 + 1 Trait™ Writing
Assessment Scoring Guide

WOW!
Exceeds expectations

5 STRONG:
shows control and skill in this trait;
many strengths present

4 EFFECTIVE:
on balance, the strengths outweigh the
weaknesses; a small amount of
revision is needed

3 DEVELOPING:
strengths and need for revision are
about equal; about half-way home

2 EMERGING:
need for revision outweighs strengths;
isolated moments hint at what the
writer has in mind

1 NOT YET:
a bare beginning; writer not yet
showing any control

IDEAS
ORGANIZATION
VOICE
WORD CHOICE
SENTENCE FLUENCY
CONVENTIONS
PRESENTATION
IDEAS AND CONTENT
(Development)

5
This paper is clear and focused. It holds the reader's attention. Relevant anecdotes and details enrich the central theme.
A. The topic is narrow and manageable.
B. Relevant, telling, quality details give the reader important information that goes beyond the obvious or predictable.
C. Reasonably accurate details are present to support the main ideas.
D. The writer seems to be writing from knowledge or experience; the ideas are fresh and original.
E. The reader's questions are anticipated and answered.
F. Insight—an understanding of life and a knack for picking out what is significant—is an indicator of high level performance, though not required.

3
The writer is beginning to define the topic, even though development is still basic or general.
A. The topic is fairly broad; however, you can see where the writer is headed.
B. Support is attempted, but doesn't go far enough yet in fleshing out the key issues or story line.
C. Ideas are reasonably clear, though they may not be detailed, personalized, accurate, or expanded enough to show indepth understanding or a strong sense of purpose.
D. The writer seems to be drawing on knowledge or experience, but has difficulty going from general observations to specifics.
E. The reader is left with questions. More information is needed to "fill in the blanks."
F. The writer generally stays on the topic but does not develop a clear theme. The writer has not yet focused the topic past the obvious.

1
As yet, the paper has no clear sense of purpose or central theme. To extract meaning from the text, the reader must make inferences based on sketchy or missing details. The writing reflects more than one of these problems:
A. The writer is still in search of a topic, brainstorming, or has not yet decided what the main idea of the piece will be.
B. Information is limited or unclear or the length is not adequate for development.
C. The idea is a simple restatement of the topic or an answer to the question with little or no attention to detail.
D. The writer has not begun to define the topic in a meaningful, personal way.
E. Everything seems as important as everything else; the reader has a hard time sifting out what is important.
F. The text may be repetitious, or may read like a collection of disconnected, random thoughts with no discernable point.

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Restless Work, Draft Three

When something needs
To be explored in that way of thinking called writing
I pull on boots
Long sleeves, gloves.
And that helmet with its own little sun strapped to the front
And head into the mines

Inside those darkened tunnels
Where ideas swirl in dust
kicked up by swinging picks.

I dig

A deep trench, across the surface of an idea
An open sore in the side of a mountain
And read the idea within like something being excavated
And be content to say I understand what I have seen
What I have written

But I get restless
and if I let that restlessness,
drive my pick deeper,
let it pry out that single
rough, raw stone

a lump of
ideas packed down by heat,
voice distilled by pressure,
language pressed down by time
made into
a diamond of meaning,

I could be content
With the jewel of this process

Or

I can choose to resee it

Take that one, single rough raw stone,
Find a crack that lets me in
And cut a face
And cut a face
And cut a face

Orbiting the thing that lies within
Worrying about what shape would serve it best
Each tiny deliberate cut
A poem
A story
A conversation

Until what I mean
What is just an idea
But more than an idea
With all its beauty
Complexity
And flaws
Come shining through.

Author's Reflection and Plan
I'm getting closer to what I think is what this poem is supposed to be. I want to spend some more time exploring that idea in the seventh stanza where I introduce the diamond metaphor—something about holding and feeling the weight of the unpolished object. That eighth stanza still bothers me too. I've also got some word choices that don't seem to fit. At the end, I still think I need to slow it down and explore that part and the idea of what is left being smaller but more valuable, a better key to knowing the vast reservoir of mountainside from which it came. I also need to spend some time really making sure the line lengths and structures do what I need them to do for the reader and the ideas in the poem. I think I'm going to share this with my writing group before doing a final version.
Before: *Along for the Ride*

Chapter One

This is not a story about divorce. It isn’t a story about wanting my family to be whole again or wondering what I did wrong for all this to happen. I’d be lying if I didn’t admit those thoughts have crossed my mind. But this story is about something different.

Since that day this all started (or the day we had to acknowledge the weirdness of our lives) I’ve slowly come to realize one fact: the most difficult thing I’ve ever done is live with a secret everybody already knows.

That doesn’t make a lot of sense, but it’s kind of like this. I once gave a speech in my seventh grade social studies class on cloning during which I realized that the pair of underwear that got stuck in the pants leg when I stripped down to get in the shower the night before was still in there. I’d put on the same pair of pants that morning when I’d woken up twenty minutes late for school. I’d only registered the weird mass around my shin as I was walking toward the front of the room. It wasn’t until I’d flipped over to the second note card that I realized what it might be that was now creeping down my toward the toe of my shoe. And when I looked down and saw that pink, scalloped elastic edge peeking out from under the cuff of those pants, I knew I was in trouble. I knew everyone saw, was pretty sure they might even be stifling laughter or averting their eyes because they didn’t want to get involved or embarrass me.

But here’s the kicker: I knew exactly how idiotic I looked with my dirty, wadded Strawberry Shortcake day of the week panties trying to make an entrance into the world, but I didn’t do anything about it. I didn’t play it off as a joke or run screaming from the room. I just sat there, praying not EVERYBODY had noticed or that not that many
people would find it interesting enough to talk about at lunch later. I didn’t do anything, because it seemed like the only thing to do. I only hoped I’d blend in enough if I just didn’t move (like the people on Jurassic Park right before they get eaten by the T-Rex).

So now, I kind of live this way. When I walk in a room, everybody knows that something is more than just dysfunctional in my house. That they all knew my parents hadn’t gotten divorced for any normal reason like one of my parents was having an affair with the golf pro at the country club. I should be so lucky.

The strangest part of the story is probably that we didn’t even know there was a story until it ended. I’d been one of those kids who feared divorce like lice or something worse as the parents of my friends split up around me. So when I was 12 and my dad and mom were in the kitchen of the sprawling ranch house situated at the end of the quiet cul-de-sac in the very nice neighborhood, I heard them argue for the first time. They didn’t see me—I was on the floor in front on the chair that my sister and I fought over every day. my head and neck against its side, my body flattened to the carpet and the my toes opening and closing the cabinets where we stored the board games for family night beneath the TV set.

“Well, I feel like shit, too . . .” I heard my mother whisper. I froze. I had never heard my mother talk like this. I once ate half a bar of Ivory soap as she stood glowering over me when I called my little sister a butthole.

“Don’t even start . . .” my father was whispering, too. There was an edge in his voice that I had never heard before—his tone a curse more than his words. I tried to melt into the carpet, to at once hear and not hear my parents fighting across the room in the kitchen, surrounded by the cherry wood cupboards and hum of the refrigerator.
And that was all I heard. That turned out to be the only argument I ever heard from my parents, and I guess now that was part of the problem. So when my dad sort of moved out to start a business a few counties away, we didn’t talk about it or ask questions. He was getting weirder after all by this point. When he came home only once every couple of months, we didn’t really ask any questions. But the night the police had to come and take him away, we were surprised anyway. Surprised when my mother sat us down the next morning after crying most of the night in her room, and told us very plainly that they had been separated for almost a year and the divorce would actually be finalized sometime within the next few weeks.

The tears began to well in her eyes then, and she swallowed hard before dropping the next bomb on Abby and me. “Your father is mentally ill,” she paused and looked up at the popcorn texture of the ceiling. It seemed she’d counted every bump before she was able to speak again. “He’s been showing signs for the past ten years or so, but it’s just not a good idea for things to continue like this for now.” So the previous night’s events hadn’t been so much the catalyst as the confirmation that this was the route she needed to take.

I couldn’t speak. My father had been for all practical purposes crazy for the last 10 years, but my mother had managed to keep us from finding out? This was after all the same woman I caught stuffing Christmas stockings when I was all of four years old. The same woman who managed to tell every swim team mother that I had not yet gotten my period when I was standing RIGHT THERE. The woman could not keep a secret. How had this one stayed so well hidden?
On the other hand, in a moment, ten years of weird behavior and comments rushed into my mind. Dad losing his beloved pilot’s license for reasons unknown to us. Mom leaving suddenly from swim meets or Vacation Bible School meetings and Dad’s absence for days afterward. His obsession with bizarre hobbies like really big lawnmowers. Okay, maybe that wasn’t a symptom exactly. But as I thought, I realized the pieces had all been sitting there in front of us all the time, we just never put them together. Sometimes weird is the only normal you get.

“So, what does this mean?” Abby asked, tears streaming down her cheeks and through the pan makeup she’d recently started wearing too heavily in the style of her dance team Nazi compatriots.

“It means that he won’t be coming home again, girls,” Mom sighed, but Abby cut her off.

“No, I get that part from the divorce, but do you mean Dad is crazy, or something?” she persisted.

I joined in coldly, “Define mentally ill, Mother.”

Mom looked a little squeamish, like we’d just asked her exactly how the stork gets the babies to the right houses. “Well, the human brain is very complex . . .” mom was putting on her science teacher voice. She had returned to teaching middle school only in the past few years, about the time that we started ignoring some of Dad’s weirder behaviors.

“Yeah, we know that from the Discovery channel. How ill is dad’s complex brain precisely?” She was evading and I was losing patience.
She stared at the two of us for a long moment. No one moved except to lift a hand to wipe a tear or nose that threatened to dribble onto a lap. At last she found the words.

“Your father . . .” it didn’t seem right to see her vulnerable, “your father has a chemical imbalance that when medicated is very manageable, but when not, is . . . well, what you saw last night.” This was the first time any of us had mentioned the events of the previous evening.

Mom took our silence as confusion. “You’re both swimmers—let me try to put this another way. The chlorine levels at the pool have a pretty specific range—too high or too low and it’s bad.”

My patience was gone. “Except when the chlorine is off at the Y nobody goes batshit and starts mumbling conspiracy theories.” Although once when it was really high, Susie Backman broke out in hives.

Mom let the profanity pass as Abby dove back in, “So how out of balance is he?”

Mom held up two hands like scales, teetered back and forth with the imaginary weight, and finally lowered one hand to her lap and the other to her chin. Her shoulders slumped and we all deflated with her for a moment.

“Is there a NAME for this ‘imbalance’, mother?” I asked, surprised at the edge in my own voice.

Here it was. Mom really had that look that she didn’t want to tell us something. The same look I’d seen on her face when she backed over our dog on the way out of the garage one morning. After looking around the room, as if someone was going to show up and go all Oprah and calmly explain the entire situation and our role in it, she clasped her
hands together in a tight ball on her lap and looked just over our heads as she said, “Your father is a paranoid schizophrenic.”

I watched a full two full minutes sweep by on the grandfather clock in the corner as we let it sink in.

And then Abby started to shake next to me.

I had my typically mature reaction to things. I got mad. Who knows why or at whom, but I did.

“Perfect. Isn’t that what all those halfwits on soap operas are always getting?” I challenged.

Mom glared at me, sitting up a little straighter. I could sense an argument between us building. It felt good to know she was mad at me. “This is not a soap opera, Evelyn,” she began. She always used my full name when she was really mad at me. But before she could continue, I interrupted.

“So which personality have we been enjoying all these years? Does he have better ones?”

Now she was pissed at me. Normalcy at last.

“He does not have multiple personality disorder. He does not think he is someone else. He does suffer from delusions, he’s extremely paranoid . . . extremely volatile and it’s getting worse.” She delivered these words evenly, fighting to keep her composure.

I backed off when I thought enough life had come back into her. “So why doesn’t he just take the medicine?” Abby asked, her voice a helpless whisper.
Mom softened, turned toward her and tried to sound like she was used to this idea by now. “Part of the illness is thinking that everybody is out to get you, and when he thinks that, he convinces himself that the doctor’s are not trying to help him.”

Mom stood up and walked to the window, leaned against the wall and continued. “Things are at the point now where I’m just afraid it might not be a good idea for him to live here. He’s too unpredictable, uncooperative.”

She’d used those exact words to describe me on the phone to my aunt, but nobody was talking about moving me out.

“I just don’t know what else to do,” she finished, signaling an end to the conversation.

We didn’t either. We just found out that our dad was nuts, our parents were divorcing, and it had all been building under our noses for the last 10 years. So we just sat there. I really wanted to turn on the TV. The silence and stillness and reality were enough to make me question my own sanity. I needed something a little less real than this.

Abby quietly got up, crossed to my mom, and hugged her. I stayed where I was until mom looked at me as I sat stonily on the green corduroy ottoman. I rose and went over too. She gathered us in, and held us as tightly as she could for as long as we would let her.

Finally, I couldn’t handle it anymore. “I’m going to practice,” I said by way of an apology or an excuse. Even though it was Saturday morning and practice didn’t start for another two hours, Mom just nodded. Abby pulled away too. And as we went down the
halls to our rooms, I heard mom in the living room, saying mainly to herself, “things are going to be okay. They’re going to be okay.”

It was tough to share her optimism. We’d only had 6 or so minutes to let the news sink in. It would probably take me a full half hour to get to the coping stage. I just needed to swim.
May 18, 2004

Jennifer Bradbury  
304 Rainbow Drive  
Burlington, WA 98233

Dear Ms. Bradbury:

Thank you for submitting Along for the Ride to the twenty-second annual Delacorte Press Contest for a First Young Adult Novel. I am sorry to tell you that your submission was not selected as our prizewinner; however, because it did stand out among the submissions, I wanted to write to you and discuss your story.

I think you have a very interesting premise here, and there are some great moments in the text. Unfortunately, I just couldn't get into the narrative voice, and the story felt too loose and rambling. The emotions of the narrator were too vague and easy—I never really got the sense of what her Dad means to her. Sometimes she sounds affectionate and sad, but in other places she sounds as if he never meant anything to her anyway, and bored with the whole matter. Of course, a complex array of emotions would be expected in this situation, but Eve's never rang completely true for me. This is not to say that her emotions were not true, but there is something in the telling that makes her feel less serious or legitimate.

Perhaps telling the story in a slightly more linear, real-time fashion would help eliminate the sense of distance in the narrative voice. Rather than having so many long passages where Eve is explaining the family history and all of that, why not just show it all happening? Have her reacting in the moment, with only a little reflection afterward. Remember, the key to good writing is show, not tell. Integrate her thoughts and emotions into the story, rather than separating them as long, rambling speeches to the reader. Indeed, in several places I felt the story lagged and lacked drive. For example, the scene in the movie theater is great, but it takes over five pages to get into it. The friend introductions/backgrounds in the beginning also seem to take forever before the story can move on.

What is this story really about? You need to answer that question and make sure each chapter moves the main issue in some way that makes the reader want to keep reading. Yes, there are several components to Eve's life, and you can illustrate them all, but it needs to be in service of one story that you are trying to tell. And, ultimately, that story needs to be gripping and powerful. Eliminate any boring extraneous material. Detail is essential, but needs to be well-chosen and purposeful. You can create fun little back
stories for her friendships and have Eve talk about all sorts of subjects, but if it doesn’t move the story along, it will inevitably drag. You need to weed your own good ideas—it’s a difficult thing to do, but if the story is about Eve and her experience with her schizophrenic dad, everything needs to come from that. Show that experience with a variety of incidents, rather than just have Eve talk about it. Simplify the structure and elements you want to explore and stick to that structure. Start with a straightforward mission—to show what life with Eve’s dad is like. Make each chapter illustrate the mission in some new, distinct and building way, and Eve’s character will build along with it. You have some good moments in here—the movie theater scene, the drive at Christmas; try putting those moments together more simply and with true narrative tension building.

I hope these comments are helpful. If you do decide to revise this story, I would be happy to reconsider it for publication.

Sincerely,

Joe Cooper

Delacorte Press

P.S. You may like to read Keeper of the Night, by Kimberly Willis Holt. It’s a very different approach, but there is something similar in the stories. Holt pares the story down to the essentials, but there is much complexity at the same time.
Dear Mr. Cooper,

Thank you for your letter on May 18th in regard to my entry in the Delacorte Young Adult Press Contest for a First Young Adult Novel. My relief at hearing from you after months of paranoid wondering about all the ways the manuscript could have gotten lost, or how much it had been hated and laughed at upon reading, was palpable as I opened the envelope and began reading your words. And while I was a bit disappointed, satisfaction and encouragement quickly replaced that sinking feeling that I had failed to do it right the first time.

You see, your comments affirmed what I knew about the text when I sent it in. I probably shouldn’t have sent it in at that stage in the first place, but this is truly my first time writing a novel and I suppose I am as prone to make mistakes in this as anything. My saving grace is that someone had the courtesy to point them out, but also point at that there is something worth saying, worth salvaging, and ultimately worth reading in the story. The voice of my main character, Eve, was as hard to pin down in the writing as it apparently was for you as a reader. You are right in pointing out that having a whole range of emotions regarding the events in the text, but I know I didn’t do quite the job I needed to in giving her a clear central set of emotions regarding her father. A number of
reasons come to mind for me now that I have had the time and space to reflect. I think in
the telling I was trying to create some distance between me and the narrator—having
lived a story and trying to tell it is sometimes a difficult thing to do. I think I was also
assuming this might be the only chance I had to write a novel, and I wanted to pack in all
the anecdotes, characters, feelings and observations as I could, so the effect ended up
being something like someone who goes overboard with the lights at Christmas—too
much going on and competing for attention, including in the voice of the narrator.

I understand that not only was the voice difficult to track, but the arc of the story
as well. I struggled deeply with this, and never fully resolved my restlessness regarding
it fragmentation. On reflection, I think the story ended up the way it did because it was
written in such isolated pieces, and I went back later trying to weave a narrative and
fictionalized world around the main plot of Eve, her family and her father. It is
interesting that the scenes you mention that worked for you as a reader, the movie theater,
Christmas and others focusing on her those milestone moments with the father, were not
only the first pieces I wrote, but also the ones that were most true. I think going back and
trying to cultivate more of those moments in the text will be difficult but rewarding work.
I am excited about one possible means to address both the movement of the plot and the
management of competing voices throughout the text that I have been studying and
researching for my thesis: multigenre writing. This method—employed in novels like
Monster by Walter Dean Myers, Nothing But the Truth by Avi, and to a lesser extent
Kimberly Willis Holt’s impressionistic Keeper of the Night that I read on your
recommendation—can be powerful in rendering meaning and understanding both for
author and audience. As you’ll see in the sample rewrites, I have been experimenting
with new voices (Eve’s therapist, her sister, and her father) through letters, poems and case notes. I don’t yet know how successful it might be, but I’m excited at what it’s showing me about the characters and the true heart of the story. I thought at first it might fragment the narrative, but it’s doing just the opposite by allowing me, and ultimately my readers (which for now still number only my husband and my mother) to revolve around the heart of the story more carefully.

You also mention that the story simply drags at points, and it dragged in the telling as well. Your advice to show and not tell is familiar, something I drill into my students, but apparently did not allow to guide my writing as closely as I should have. By allowing the story to evolve into a more linear one, I think that both this movement will be improved. There was certainly the feeling as I wrote that I had to get to some magic word count to be in the range of what a novel was, and the text suffered for it. It bothered me as I wrote it, though it was relatively unintentional, but the restlessness was there all the same. So a great deal of what is there is coming out, but as I remove those elements that do not serve the story, I don’t really mourn (not much anyway) because I’m understanding that the characters, stories, and images simply don’t belong in this one. This story is about what it’s like to feel shame for something—someone—you’re not responsible for. To feel haunted by a father and the demons he invents, even though he is only dead in ways that the rest of the world may not see. To understand that even though happy endings are nice, they are not often true, and that in fact things often do not end at all. And I hope it will give comfort to teens who deal with parents in similar situations, experience similarly confused feelings, and carry things that are not theirs to carry.
So I want to thank you, as a reader of my text, for responding with such an honest, articulate response of your own restlessness. Know that it mirrors my own, and powerfully reminds me that the real work of writing is in the revision, where meaning is allowed to emerge as it changes both writer and text. I know you’ll never read this letter-I don’t even want you to. But I wanted to thank you just to same and tell you what I’m relearning as I revise this manuscript: rewriting is the real writing, that revision is as someone wiser than me once said—“the process by which spilled milk becomes ice cream.” That’s what I like to think of happening here, though it may be tough, cranking that old rickety bucket, impatience growing as I wait, but I hope the results will be sweet.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Bradbury
Chapter One

My father’s ghost haunts our family. We wonder where his ghost might show up, what it might be thinking when it does, who we might be in its mind, or how it might frighten or humiliate us in some new unthinkable way.

But I do not believe in ghosts and my father is not dead. Yet he haunts us still, dead only in the ways that others cannot see, and for which we have no occasions or ceremonies. And he is a ghost, all the same. A ghost of the man who once worked too hard to care for his family. An empty husk of the man who was the son of a poor tobacco farmer and always worked too hard because of it. A shadow of the man who used to hang back at the edges of sidewalks when he took Abby and me trick or treating on Halloween.

He’s like a cicada skin stuck to the side of a tree after the bug has grown and molted. But something else has come to live inside him that form. Something scarier than simple ghosts who wander from life to death. Something that makes me feel terrible for wishing he’d disappear completely, not just for the weeks and months that left us fearful and waiting for what might happen next.

My mother had decided she didn’t want to be married to such an apparition, and I could not say I blamed her in the least. But this isn’t really about a divorce (nothing like it ever is), which is an odd thing for me to say. I’d feared such a tear in my family’s life from the time when it first started happening to my friends when I was in kindergarten. That was before those parents stopped allowing their little girls to come and play at our
house. That was before, when I thought that divorce was the worst thing that could happen to my family.

But it isn’t a story about wanting my family to be whole again or wondering what I did wrong for all this to happen, either. Still, I’d be lying if I didn’t admit that those thoughts have crossed my mind.

This story is about shame. Shame I feel for something I don’t control, a person I’m not responsible for, a burden I’m not supposed to carry. But it sticks to me anyway, like the bad haircut I got in sixth grade that took forever to grow out. Like that mistake, this can’t be hidden, though I’ve little hope that time will heal it over like it did the heartbreak of too-short bangs and a frizzy perm.

This story is also about a family. A mother and two daughters, and the father that lurked like a stray cat at the edges of their lives--sometimes affectionate, often distant, inconsistent as happiness. A story about how the bonds that get severed reach out and wrap themselves around our ankles and keep us from running away. A story about why children should be able to divorce their parents.

But mostly it’s a story about wondering whether I still have to love him, when that love was shaky in the first place and now he frightens more than worries me.

I have this to carry. I have the guilt that lingers because I wish at times quietly that he would die and people would pity me and it would all be tragic in a different sort of way. I have the fear of what he might do to me, to my mother, to my sister Abby. I have the sinking feeling that it might be something he passed on to me, like his dark hair and sharp chin.

That’s what I have.
He has schizophrenia.

Chapter Two

Home
By Abby

In this place,
where orange shag carpet meets paneled walls,
and laundry stays piled up on top of the dryer
and the evening news is always on,
my father
left his keys
on a shelf
each night.

In this place,
where bikes grow like landscaping in the front yard
where fireflies start blinking in the trees before the skies even go dark,
where the swingset stands rusting behind the house,
my father
carefully clipped the
one point three acres
with a
too
big
lawnmower.

In this place
where the ditch swells after summer storms
where hidden paths weave around the wooded lots
where half finished houses sit empty,
my father
smoked Winstons
as he steered
a gold Cadillac
home each evening.

In this place
where Tony Johson sells dimebags from his back porch,
where I wish my best friend had stayed,
where kind Mr. Ben pretended not to have seen,
my father
walking around the cul-de-sac last night
in
his underwear.

In this place
where “Abigail Margaret” means I’m in trouble
where “Cause I’m the momma,” is law,
where “Daddy doesn’t feel well”
my father
didn’t say
much
at all.

In this place
where biscuits bake in the mornings,
where smoke pours onto the deck from the grill,
where we dine on fried chicken from the Stop-n-Go on Sundays,
my father
refused to eat
the sandwich
I made him
that night.

In this place
where lies began,
where the people we can’t see scare us most,
where memories tumble like whitewater beneath a broken bridge
between me
and the man
who
was
my father.
Chapter Three

Mom Tells the Truth

“Your father is mentally ill,” I told my two beautiful daughters. I fought back the tears and rage, pausing to look up at the popcorn texture of the ceiling, counting every bump before I was able to speak again without sobbing. “He’s been showing signs for the past ten years or so, but it’s just not a good idea for things to continue like this for now.” After what they’d seen last night, this couldn’t be that surprising.

Abby and Eve stared at me, unable or unwilling to speak. I was a terrible secret keeper. I’d given up on Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny long ago, when Abby caught me stuffing stockings one Christmas Eve. I’d blurted out to the rest of the swim team mothers when Eve was thirteen that she still hadn’t gotten her period when she was standing right there. My daughter didn’t speak to me for two whole days. The only reason this one had stayed so well kept, I suppose, it that they simply didn’t want to know.

“So, what does this mean?” Abby asked, tears streaming down her cheeks and through the pan makeup she’d recently started wearing a bit too heavily like the rest of the girls on the dance team at school. She was always such a beautiful girl, and I couldn’t wait for the day when she realized she didn’t need that stuff at all.

“It means that he won’t be coming home again, girls,” I sighed, but Abby cut me off.

“No, I get that part from the divorce, but do you mean Dad is crazy, or something?” she persisted, her voice garbled by tears threatening to rain down at any moment, like storm clouds hanging in the air.
“Define mentally ill, Mother,” Eve said. Her voice was hard, and I feared already that what I knew about her was true—she would wrap the pain and disappointment deep inside her for too long.

This was harder than telling them all those years ago about sex, without openly begging them to never have it until they were old and married. “Well, the human brain is very complex . . .” I began, unwittingly adopting the science teacher voice I used in the seventh grade classroom I’d returned too when I began to see that my husband would not be able to support us anymore.

My ex-husband.

“Yeah, we know that from the Discovery channel. How ill is dad’s complex brain precisely?” Evie pushed. I wanted to cry for how hard this would all be for her. For how long she would hurt from it, my daughter who’d always wanted to be a daddy’s girl.

I stared at them for a long moment, Abby moving to wipe a tear that threatened to fall into her lap. Evie was like a stone.

“Your father . . .” I tried not to sound scared as I said the words “your father has a chemical imbalance that when medicated is very manageable, but when not, is. . . well, what you saw last night.”

I misinterpreted their silence as confusion. “You’re both swimmers—let me try to put this another way. The chlorine levels at the pool have a pretty specific range—too high or too low and it’s bad.”

Evie almost shouted, “Except when the chlorine is off at the Y nobody goes batshit and starts mumbling conspiracy theories.”
Abby spoke before I could think to correct Evie for her language, “So how out of balance is he?”

I held up my two hands like a pair of scales, my left finger still bearing the rings John had given me. My palms teetered back and forth with the imaginary weight, and finally I let one hand fall to my lap and the other rise to my chin. The air seemed to rush out of the room in the silence.

“Is there a NAME for this ‘imbalance’, mother?” Evie asked.

Here it was. They knew, but they’d make me say it. I had the same feeling I’d had the morning I backed over the dog on the way out of the garage one morning and had to tell these girls what’d happened. I looked around the room, fantasizing for a moment that someone, Ophrah preferably, would walk in and calmly explain to my daughters what I had to tell them. No one came. My hands clenched of their own accord in my lap as I looked over the tops of their heads and to the framed picture of the mother reading to her children that I loved so much before forcing the words out of my mouth, “Your father is a paranoid schizophrenic.”

Abby began to shake, Evie stared at the secondhand sweeping by on the grandfather clock, seeming to grow another layer on herself as we waited for something to happen. Finally she spoke.

“Perfect. Isn’t that what all those halfwits on soap operas are always getting?” She challenged. I knew what she was doing, and knew I needed let her have the reaction from me she needed—something normal in this scary moment.
It felt good to play our roles, "This is not a soap opera, Evelyn," I began, using her full name to let her know she was treading on thin ice. But before I could continue, she interrupted.

"So which personality have we been enjoying all these years? Does he have better ones?"

"He does not have multiple personality disorder. He does not think he is someone else. He \textit{does} suffer from delusions, he’s extremely paranoid . . . extremely volatile and it’s getting worse." I delivered these words evenly, fighting to keep my composure, walking the fine line between arguing with and reassuring her.

She seemed to back off at this, confident that some life had come back into me.

"So why doesn’t he just take the medicine?" Abby asked, her voice a helpless whisper.

I softened, turned toward her and tried to sound like I was used to this idea by now. "Part of the illness is thinking that everybody is out to get you, and when he thinks that, he convinces himself that the doctors are not trying to help him . . . that I’m not trying to help him."

They watched me and I felt the tension again of abandoning someone in such great need and taking care of two souls who hadn’t asked for this to happen.

"I just don’t know what else to do," I said.

Abby quietly got up, crossed to me and hugged me around the waist like she had when she was too small to reach any higher. Eve stayed where she was until I caught her gaze and she jumped to my arms before I could see the tears spill from her green eyes. I gathered them in, and held them tightly, remembering nights of violent storms when they’d come to me for promises that the lightning wouldn’t reach inside and grab them.
held them as long as they would let me, and said more to myself than to them, “Things are going to be okay. Everything’s going to be okay.”

I prayed that they would believe me

Chapter Four

Abby’s Journal

Please god, let me wake up, let me wake up, let me wake up.

Chapter Five

That was where it did and didn’t begin. The day I learned that it was happening, or the day I stopped being able to pretend that it wasn’t, that day a few days before my mother put the house on the market.

I was forced to acknowledge that for the past several years it had been like my family was on a runaway stage coach, like in the old Westerns my father used to retreat to the basement to watch on the second TV. It seemed like there was always a runaway stage coach at some point in those movies, where some beautiful lady, maybe in this version with a pair of frightened daughters, trapped aboard a rickety wooden coach, wheels spinning like they’d fly off at any moment, hurtling toward a cliff, horses mad with fear or fury, the driver helpless to stop them, sleeping or shot off his perch by outlaws. I still am not sure if my father is the driver (dismantled by his own sickness) or the horses (raging and wild with fear) dragging us along behind them.

But here’s the difference—we had to pretend that everything was all right. That nothing had changed, and it was perfectly normal to be hurtling toward a giant cliff with
frenzied piano music thundering in the background. And everybody else pretended, too, that things were normal.

Since that day this all started (or the day we had to acknowledge the weirdness of our lives) I’ve slowly come to realize one fact: the most difficult thing a body can do is live with a secret everybody already knows.

That doesn’t make a lot of sense, but it’s kind of like this. I once gave a speech in my seventh grade social studies class on cloning during which I realized that the pair of underwear that got stuck in the pants leg when I stripped down to get in the shower the night before was still in there. I’d put on the same pair of pants that morning when I’d woken up twenty minutes late for school. I’d only registered the weird mass around my shin as I was walking toward the front of the room. It wasn’t until I’d flipped over to the second note card that I realized what it might be that was now creeping down my toward the toe of my shoe. And when I looked down and saw that pink, scalloped elastic edge peeking out from under the cuff of those pants, I knew I was in trouble. I knew everyone saw, was pretty sure they might even be stifling laughter or averting their eyes because they didn’t want to get involved or embarrass me.

But here’s the kicker: I knew exactly how idiotic I looked with my dirty, wadded Strawberry Shortcake day of the week panties trying to make an entrance into the world, but I didn’t do anything about it. I didn’t play it off as a joke or run screaming from the room. I just sat there, praying not EVERYBODY had noticed or that not that many people would find it interesting enough to talk about at lunch later. I didn’t do anything, because it seemed like the only thing to do. I only hoped I’d blend in enough if I just didn’t move (like the people on Jurassic Park right before they get eaten by the T-Rex).
So now, I kind of live this way. When I walk in a room, everybody knows that something is more than just dysfunctional in my house. That they all knew my parents weren’t divorcing for any normal reason like one of them was having an affair with the golf pro at the country club. I should be so lucky.

I’d only my parents argue once, when they didn’t see me on the other side of the chair next to the TV from where they traded angry words in tones I’d never heard in the kitchen. I guess now that was part of the problem. So when my dad sort of moved out to start a business a few counties away, we didn’t talk about it or ask questions. He was getting weirder after all by this point. When he came home only once every couple of months, we didn’t really ask any questions. But the night the police had to come and take him away, we were surprised anyway. Surprised when my mother sat us down the next morning after crying most of the night in her room, and told us very plainly that they had been separated for almost a year and the divorce would actually be finalized sometime within the next few weeks. We of course had known things were wrong, I even remembered a time when I was six and my parents sat down together after we’d been staying with family friends because as they kindly told us, “your daddy wasn’t feeling well and had to go to a special hospital to get some rest.” A week later they had both sat down together and tried to explain, but all my sister and I could do was ask silly questions, ones that were based more on what we knew about hospitals from TV shows, and I think my parents gave up trying to make us understand the delicacies of brain chemistry.

But now we had to face that things weren’t normal, that people couldn’t pretend to know that things weren’t as normal as we all pretended they were. Now ten years of
bizarre behavior came spilling out like bones crammed into closets. Dad losing his beloved pilot’s license for reasons unknown to us. Mom leaving suddenly from swim meets or Vacation Bible School meetings and Dad’s absence for days afterward. The countless times he felt not like our father, but someone to be afraid of. His obsession with bizarre hobbies like really big lawnmowers. Okay, maybe that wasn’t a symptom exactly. But as I thought, I realized the pieces had all been sitting there in front of us all the time, we just never put them together. Sometimes weird is the only normal you get.
When something needs
To be discovered
By that way of thinking called writing

I tug on boots
Long sleeves, gloves,
That helmet with its own little sun
And head into the mines

Inside those darkened tunnels
Where ideas swirl in dust
Kicked up by swinging picks,
I dig

A deep trench across the surface of an idea
An open sore in the side of a mountain
The idea within like something excavated

I can say I am content
That I understand what I have seen
What I have written

But I get restless

And if I let that restlessness
drive my pick deeper,
let it pry out that
single
rough,
raw stone

A lump of ideas
Packed down by heat,
Voice distilled by pressure,
Language squeezed through process
Made into
A diamond
Heavy in my hand
Ripe with possibility

And again
I could be content
With this jewel of meaning
Or

I can choose to resee it

And take that single
rough
raw
stone,
Find a crack that lets me in,
And cut a face,
And cut a face,
And cut a face,

Orbiting the thing that lies within
Worrying what shape
would serve it best
Each tiny deliberate cut unveiling
A poem
A story
A conversation

Until what I mean
What was just an idea
With all its beauty
Complexity
And flaws
Comes shining through,
With a brilliance that tells
Where it came from
And that it’s true.
Restlessness Resolved
An Afterword

When I began exploring the concept of restless revision through my research, it wasn’t until my advisor, Dr. David Lenoir, suggested I consider a multigenre approach that I began to see the connections and reasons for doing so. In truth, I sort of acted like I knew what he was talking about (even though my understanding of this type of writing was fuzzy at best, stemming mainly from an *English Journal* issue I had skimmed through). Still, I was in the throes of research (and under a tight deadline) and clung to any guidance I could like a shipwreck survivor might clutch a chunk of driftwood in high seas. I’m so glad I did.

It happened that as my research states, the different genres in the paper truly began to converse with each other, and I at times became the recorder of those discussions. The core of the paper began with the research. Early in the process, I was still a bit apprehensive about the multigenre approach (in fact, I half wondered how I would get away with something so “unacademic”), and defaulted to the established mode of a literary survey in an effort to convince myself that this was a real academic exercise. That research was rich, yielding valuable insights about the nature and truth of restlessness in revision, but the secondary focus on multigenre truly captivated me. I learned, primarily through the work of Tom Romano, that multigenre was not only the key to truly understanding a topic as broad and nebulous as revision but also the best way to communicate what I was learning and relearning.

So even as I drafted the research portion of the thesis, those other genres began to emerge. I actually used the first draft of the poem to generate and crystallize the ideas of my paper. I often advise my students that if they can’t summarize the findings and
importance of their research in a sentence, they probably need to focus the work a little more carefully. The poem did that for me, even in its early form, by forcing me to pare down the language, create a meaningful metaphor and allow the simple truth of the ideas to emerge.

I continued working on the poem throughout the completion of the other representative pieces, allowing my revision and revisitation to act as sort of a litmus test for the each work in turn. It was almost as if the poem--even as it evolved and become more complete as the other pieces grew--was asking of each as it was written, “Do you fit with me? Do you belong?” The works and the writer were forced to respond accordingly.

Among the texts that responded to this correcting influence was the personal essay explaining my position and process as a writer. I found as I wrote and rewrote this essay that I was challenged to admit the truths of restless revision in my own writing, and my own deficiencies in dealing with those sensations adequately in the past. When I established and made explicit the personal connections to the topic, it seemed the other ideas began to take shape, that other voices were permitted to speak.

The paper naturally drew on my work as an educator as well. I’ve long been a believer that teachers who write are better equipped to help student writers, and I was reminded that this was true of teachers who rewrite in response to restlessness as well. By pulling in the slow motion lesson, a revision strategy that relies on students to identify areas in a draft that make them restless, or areas that they ignored initially because they chose not to deal with the restlessness, I was able to allow my professional voice to participate in the conversation.
That professional voice was further called upon to speak through the transcript and the review. The transcript surprised me by serving not only as a record of a number of teachers' experiences with revision but also as a model of what it means to manage the voices that tend to participate—often without invitation or continuity—in the conversation that frames a multigenre work. Initially, after transcribing the discussion, I was disappointed, fearing it had veered too far afield from my topic and I'd wasted four hours replaying the scratchy cassette tape, deciphering the words of my colleagues. But upon measuring it against the poem and the other pieces in the draft, I saw that it not only fit, but the many meanderings of the conversation I recorded weren't meanderings at all, in much the same way that the pieces in this thesis have coalesced into a unified work.

The review, by contrast, was a taxing exercise primarily because of the genre in which I chose to present it. The six traits of writing are an important part of our curriculum and by extension my writing instruction. By examining one of those traits in isolation and through the lens of my research topic, it allowed me to see not only how powerful this part of my curriculum can be but also how true the notion of restless revision is. Giving voice to that identity and genre of a review was uncomfortable at first, but it gave me the necessary perspective and distance to treat the ideas honestly and see the connections.

Finally, the portions of the thesis associated with my attempt at a young adult novel were in many ways the most challenging when held to the standard of the ideas in the poem. I had tucked the draft and the letter from the publisher away, intending not to even attempt to deal with it until after the beast that was my thesis had been slain. But as I researched and made natural connections to my work as a teacher, the truth of restless
revision in my personal writing was impossible to ignore. And while the chapters may not be about revision per se, they certainly stand for me as the most compelling example of what can happen when restlessness is allowed to do its work for a writer. And as I revised the initial chapter, I took to heart the truth of multigenre writing, testing the assertion I found and supported in my research paper that multigenre is the single most effective writing strategy for understanding a topic and for practicing authentic revision. This approach was not one I had considered before I conducted this research, and I don’t think I would have been able to tell the story as faithfully and creatively as I feel I am able to do now with the novel. In that story, as in the thesis as a whole, the genres and voices continue to converse as I progress on my rewrite, and I’m confident and excited that the result will not only be worth reading but also a testament to the strength of multigenre writing.

In every respect, this thesis has been what it should have been for me—a learning experience. I’ve learned more about the complementary concepts of revision and multigenre writing. I’ve learned of the importance of restlessness, my role as a teacher in cultivating that phenomenon, and the potential multigenre holds for my students. And I’ve learned that as a writer, I’ve much to learn from these ideas. I hope the thesis serves as a record of this learning, and as a milestone in my parallel careers as a student, a teacher and a writer.