

Lesson 3 worksheet: scanning

Welcome to the Introduction to

Revise Your Academic Book or Dissertation !

Read this to drive home the lesson of scanning instead of revising, and working sometimes outside your text. Then print at least one copy of the worksheet.

Get some appropriate amount of your troublesome text. About 50 pages is good, and 25 will do.

Scanning for the Good Parts

I had this one project once (only once I swear)—and maybe it's happened to you—where I was writing for a while and then, splat, it just fell flat on it's face. You know how it is—either you just can't seem to get to the next step, or there are too many next steps, and you can't make any progress, or the whole thing kind of poops out on you. Especially the poop out part.

It's at those moments that my mind comes up with a great idea:

"I know what to do! Let's go back and revise what we've got so far! That'll work!"

Yep... just brilliant. So bright-eyed and bushy-tailed is my mind in those moments.

Other times it's not so naïve about what I'll believe, and it whispers to me, "C'mon, revise it. You know you want it. Just do it. How could something that feels so right be wrong?"

Learn to work outside of your text in certain stages of analysis. Direct revision of the text is a special process, not to be indulged in prematurely.

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So what happened this one time (only once, I swear), was I gave in and tried my damn best to fix what I had. I tried different beginnings, different concepts, different theories, different orders, and something I can do for endless hours really, tinkering with the sentences. I worked at this and that and all kinds of things.

It still didn't work. So at that point I was too sunk in the swamp of all the possibilities that I thought-- I just have to step away. I'll get some objectivity.

So I put that one project away for a few weeks.

But weeks later when I went to look at it with fresh eyes—on a day I had gotten enough sleep, and I felt clear headed at just the right moment in my caffeine drip—I read it again and found, to my great horror, that it was even worse than I remembered.

So at this point, confused and enraged, I defiantly threw myself at the beast and revised and revised the crap out of it, drawing on every ounce of my integrity and grit.

And it was even worse than before. It sucked, and I couldn't even remember anymore what I liked about the idea to begin with.

And so I just put it aside, defeated. I've got that endless file—you know, the one where all the troublesome writing goes "for later." It's really where my writing goes to die. Rarely does anything ever come back from there. Or rather... I mean that one time, because as I said this happened once to me.

Now, looking back at that one time event, I can see what the problem was.

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The problem was, as a whole, it sucked.

I've looked at it again recently, and found three potential articles in there, one of which was kind of a tangent and which I've since written up.

But the basic idea that I started with wasn't really something I liked and was interested in, nor could I really find even a feeling for what my point was, and there was no coming back from that. There was no way to fix the whole of it. But parts of it became something I loved.

You may have encountered from me before the strong recommendation that you "write the good parts" when drafting, and focus on what you really want to write, more than what you think you "have" to write.

Well, there is a similar moment with revision, at least when we take revision up in a systematic manner.

Here are two giant lessons I learned from this story, that happened the one time:

1. **Don't revise while you write drafts. And don't put "finishing" on unfinished work. You can't revise until you know what the argument is, how it concludes and how it gets there. You can't make decisions about all the rest until you know why you are making them and what you are trying to get to.**
2. **Everything you write has great ideas in it. At least one great thing is there in every piece you write, and this is true without exception. If you take the time to look, you will find something.**

Now let's put this in the context of the systematic path of revision, and this sample intro series which is designed to give you the key ideas you need for your revision process.

In Lesson 1, you learned the importance of taking aim, and also got to reconnect a bit with your original inspiration and things you loved about the writing process.

In Lesson 2, you learned the importance of identifying singular components of a text and of having a strategy to fix or enhance them.

Today in Lesson 3 you are going to practice the valuable skill of separating your analysis of your text from your text. And the valuable skill of not revising while you do so! We'll practice scanning your writing and finding ideas that are worth rescuing.

While this is actually an early step in the Revise Your Book or Dissertation System, it's a good time to practice it now in the intro series, because coming up next is the actual system from start to finish, so we might as well practice getting started now.

And, an added benefit for you is that you will find something great. Even if you are not going to use it now, you have it.

Practice the Technique

So maybe the best way to practice this technique is to use it on something really tough, or even something you have abandoned. The worse the better! Not to bring it back, but maybe to find something and have something for later.

But any chunk of slightly troublesome text will do. Or text that you don't quite like but also don't want to let go of. About 60 pages is a good amount. 40 will also do, or perhaps even 25

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What you are not doing

The first and utmost principle to understand is this:

You are not revising.

You are not doing revision on your text, but preparing for revision.

And you're not putting margin comments on the text either.

At all costs, we are not fixing anything and in fact you must resist completely the lure of pre-mature revision and acting on our text.

You are scanning. You have an exterior worksheet form here, and that is essential to this exercise and to systematic revision. It's very important component in systematic revision that there is another physical place, that is not the text, where important, step-by-step work gets done.

So use the worksheet here, grab your text, and scan it and record.

The basic exercise is to write down when you find something that makes you fascinated or concentrated, or somehow interested, and then say why.

Here are some examples of **What** and **Why**, the two things you're looking for. **What** is it that is interesting to you, and **why** is it interesting?

Part: description of spirit attacks timed with the buy-up of farm land

It Inquires: What else besides a reaction to neoliberal property regimes could be at play here?

Part: analysis of the moral and spiritual values of the good worker

It Inquires: why is there, now, a new conception of work and spiritual being?

Part: discussion in literature of capitalism and so-called "occult" beliefs

It Inquires: is this another ratification of the rationality of the modern and of the economic?

And so on... In each good idea there is a question I care about and would want to write about. Whether I will write about it more here in my text, or in another text, remains to be seen. But I have found some good things in my confused, meandering stalled-out text.

Now you go! Practice scanning for the good parts: get out your "bad" text, maybe 50 pages, and start scanning.

Remember, keep your analysis separate from your text. Print out your text, and print out at least one copy of the next worksheet page. Enter in the results of your scan on the worksheet.

This is in itself, physically, a great way to drive home the lesson that systematic revision begins with scanning and analysis that takes place outside the text. And of course it's practice in identifying a key piece of information: what ideas are great, and why?

Scanning for Great Ideas in the Good Parts

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Good Part:

It Inquires:

Great Work !!

And great focus! Next up, we'll go over all the steps and stages of the systematic process to Revise Your Academic Book or Dissertation. This will help you see all that you can get done with systematic revision so that you can publish your work and move on with life.

The key ideas we've gone into: there is a period of assessment, and there is a period of pre-revision, and we work outside of our text at times, and most actual revision is targeted on components with strategic outcomes in mind. It's not just going into some place in the text and moving things around, copy and pasting, tinkering with things.

In the next presentation of the intro series we'll look at the big picture, at how it all fits together. You'll see how you are going to go through the full revision step by step without indecision and anxiety so that you can get your work published, and always know you can do it the next time, too.

See you for the next lesson, and about your finished book:

You are going to get there!

get more writing help at:

AcademicMuse.org