

Lesson 2: Small Steps, Big Change

Welcome to the Introduction Part 2 of

Revise Your Academic Book or Dissertation !

You are in the right place to get past alternating, switching, unfocused revision, past **procrasterevising** and tinkering. It's time to get the attention oriented right. We're going to get targeted on particular components one at a time and experience the power of the focus of ONE.

So you've watched the video, and paused it at the right part and did not peak ahead. Right? I hope so! Because this will be fun practice if you did. It will work to really drive home the idea of step by step focus. And we're going to start with an easy example!

Hinges: The Quality Hardware of the Qualitative Scholar

In today's training we are narrowing down and pin-pointing one particularly important element in qualitative writing: the hinge.

The Hinge we are looking at today Swings between:

“research material” or “descriptive or depictive material” on the one hand and theories, concepts, and critical thinking on the other.

Switching between these levels is the hallmark of quality scholarly writing. By contrast, many writers may keep these two forms of material too separate. There are too few hinges, which leads to clunky and awkward fits and difficult transitions. Opportunities to meaningfully layer significance are missed, and the sense of nuance, interest, and relevance is limited for the reader.

When hinges swing meaningfully, the reader is propelled from one kind of room to another, and is getting all that they could want out of reading your text.

Get Started

Today we're going to focus on one of the most powerful—and I think, the best—kind of hinge: the invisible hinge. Because when you step through a door into a new room, you don't notice the hinge, do you?

So what is an invisible hinge?

An invisible hinge causes the swing into a new view and kind of material without explicitly pointing to what it is doing. The opposite of an invisible hinge is something to the effect of: "now having discussed X, I will turn to Y."

We'll get a little more into the anatomy of an invisible hinge in a moment, but let's first work at identifying them, which should not be too difficult.

And at the same time, we'll start to really drive home the idea of revising with the power of ONE.

Today we are focusing on this ONE thing. Most days in efficient revising we have some kind of singular focus. But since in this intro series we are skipping ahead, to get the idea of systemic revision, we're going to pretend we've already been doing that kind of singular work for a while. We've focused on many different elements already (we're pretending). We've done that in order. We're going through our checklists taking care of different components of the text. And today we happen to be focusing on hinges. So we can relax about everything else, and not get distracted, because we're only checking for hinges now.

So check out this text below, read or scan. Where are the invisible hinges, in this case, between description of an event, and background knowledge? Read or scan the text and then **identify the 2 biggest hinges, and draw a horizontal line at those 2 points, physically or mentally.** We'll need this to later go on to also understand the two primary ways hinges can be made "invisible."

Scanning with a targeted eye is WAY better than "revising pages." Don't revise pages or sections, revise components!

[...] The crowd waited out a hot afternoon on the central commons of Bangkok's old city, and then finally the announcer proclaimed that Luangta Maha Bua was entering the scene, to give the bars of gold over to the government. He had been on a campaign for almost four years straight, touring the country to collect gold and cash, making stops at temples everywhere to hold merit-making ceremonies to save the nation. With their money trees in hand, thousands of them, the crowd at the great Bangkok donation ritual eagerly awaited the chance to give it all away. As Luangta chanted a first blessing and began a two-hour sermon that moved, alternately, far from and close to the theme of sacrifice, restless donors continually dug cash out of their pockets or solicited from others, finding some way to keep adding, fussing, and primping over their merit making trees, most of which sported the added touches of a Thai national flag and a photo of Luangta with the Thai king on his knees.

As excitement mounted, as darkness fell, as Luangta began to wrap up his two-hour discourse and then finally settled to the end, the 100,000 plus merit makers were finally free to begin pressing anxiously toward the stage. A 30-foot-wide column of bodies and money trees surged the length of the field and hove forward through the convection of others waiting in the wings. Somehow they managed not to turn it into a stampede, with the announcer nervously pleading with the crowd to remain peaceful and orderly, to not 'waste the merit' or 'spoil the merit' and lose it all by getting their hearts into a frenzy at the last-minute and rendering in an instant all their efforts at collecting money, over the past months of time, useless and futile.

Merit, *puñña*, is in the Thai Buddhist reckoning of the ritual organizers, ultimately an affair of the 'heart' (*cai*). In theory, the tool of money or other gift to the Sangha (order of monks) is the initiator or spark of feelings which are to be enhanced and amplified with good intentions and moral behavior, ultimately refining and developing the heart (*cai*) and improving one's spiritual condition. Of course, the particular Buddhist theories that the organizers subscribe to is not necessarily the 'reality of internal feelings,' however one understands access to such a reality (and my concern here will be solely with performative definition of emotions, not the description, nor interpretive deduction, of internal states). But Buddhist theory is of course relevant here since it is one frame through which emotion is understood by participants in Buddhist rites, and especially by the organizers of such rites, who are monastics and dedicated lay practitioners. According, again, to theory, the enhancement of one's spiritual condition is afforded, oftentimes, not only through one's individual

concentration and effort, but through the communal presence of others sharing in the power of the rituals themselves as well as the degree to which the recipient of the gift already embodies a refined and meritorious character. Ostensibly, the act of merit-making connects emotion with the spiritual state of the individual donor, links that process together with others in a synergistic fashion, and connects those connections in turn to the state of merit of the recipient. One of the most common ritual symbols and practical tools in performing such connection is the use of actual string, held in the palms of monks, attached to Buddha statues, relics, and anything holy, wound round spaces in need of blessing or protecting, and physically attached to individuals in similar need. With or without the use of string (some rituals outstrip in size the quantity of string at hand), individuals, groups, and those that embody the highest spiritual values simultaneously share and generate puñña together.

[...] [edited for space, no hinge here]

While merit-making is the primary Buddhist arena that values sentiments of connection to others, in full public and ceremonial view, it is of course far from the only public validation of such sentiments of connection generally. 'Love,' rak, is another staple of Thai theories and practices of community, the word 'rak' itself carrying complex and contradictory meanings in Thai. Rak is of course a highly valued sentiment in family and romantic relationships (it is never used on favorite foods, etc.). But rak, in strict Buddhist theory, is also involved in tanha 'clinging/desire' and rag 'lust/passion.' In that sense it can be and often is referred to as a direct antagonist of mettā, loving-compassion, since mettā, which in its highest form is 'love' for all without discrimination, can be antagonized by love for particular people and especially those for whom one also has lust.

Hint: for purposes of clarity, what follows next is a transition, but it is not one of the two invisible "hinges" for the purposes of this lesson, because it's still very much a part of the background, not the event description. You'll see later it's functioning in what I call a "hair-growing pre-transition." Okay, carry on!

But rak certainly gets valued in wider realms of practice in Thai society, which is of course not oriented toward Buddhist enlightenment alone. The premier venues for valuing rak, now and in the past, include the exaltation of mother-child bonds, the realm of dramatized romance, and the insistence of nationalist propaganda, which encourages rak for the nation. Nationalist love has in the past been largely articulated in relationship to a fear of internal enemies or potential invaders, and such love has often been espoused in tandem with a hatred for others, especially communists. At times, right-wing extremist Buddhists have associated this hate with Buddhist merit, advocating the killing of communists as a Buddhist merit-making act (Keyes 1978). At the same time, and far more often, love for the nation has been more benignly encouraged as supporting the development of the nation as a distinct geo-political territory.

Thongchai Winichakul (1994) has called the object of such love, and generator of such hate, the 'geo-body,' an entity which had to be brought into discursive existence for Thais by transforming their technologies of group self-consciousness, particularly through the technology of mapping. But today, in spite of the fact that Thai citizens are occasionally kidnapped or killed by Burmese security forces in border areas, the border as a military marker of the national body does not command prominence in media attention.

And after a dwindling half-life, the u.s.-Thai cooperatively-generated hatred of internal enemies has also passed to a large extent. The geo-spatial consciousness of national and cultural identity no longer looms as the only technology with great potential reality-effects, not in a world in which the movement of finance capital has instantaneous global transport and the entire country can be brought down by the speculative moves of those who bet on international currency exchange rates, or brought down by the ways in which all forms of economic practice within the country contribute to the relative weakness or strength of the position its national money has in that global market. With the sudden crash of the Thai baht, after months of a failed state effort to keep the market price of the national currency up by buying it back from the global market with the nation's foreign currency reserves, and after the lasting, severe, and shared effects of that defeat across society, it is not geographical boundaries that are the first object of nationalistic focus anymore but the

currency itself which is the new 'territory' to be developed and defended, and which transmits the feeling of being bound in a common identity and fate. But it is not as though, despite how recent the dominating equation of money and nation is, there are not already in place ample means by which to work with, and rework, these relations of money and love, and so alter the specific trajectory for growth of the new national money-spirit.

One by one, in rapid succession and sprouting out from the bed of money trees, each bristling tree of cash was placed before the feet of Luangta Maha Bua, who sat impassively on the stage as followers bowed down before him. Big and small trees mixed in the gush forward, with the largest ones garnering oohs and ahhs and gasps, particularly those that were bristling with u.s. hundreds, or else the occasional tree of gold: actual large tree branches laced with gold chains, bracelets and jewelry destined to be melted down into gold bars but now flashing in an infinite succession of camera lights and flickering with traces of the persons who had inhabited them, before the gold's future liquidization and reformation into a stack of thick bricks of national security.

Bringing up the rear, and towering over all, was a 50-foot construction, a 'map' of Thailand made out of bright 500-baht purple bills. Giving away this nation made of money, and wedding the 'geo-body,' or the idea of the nation as circulated through mapping technology, to the national currency, perhaps nothing better embodied the exchange of one national imagination into another, borders for monetary integrity, garnering the rare remarkable glance from Luangta who for the most part seemed to take little interest in the amazing spectacle of a sea of money washing up on the shore of his stage. As the money was whisked behind the stage, so too was behind the stage the next stop for the thousands of pilgrims for the nation. There, hundreds of volunteers proceeded to defoliate a forest of money trees, creating giant piles of cash. Cordoned back with ropes and under the eyes of police, the crowd watched aghast as almost all present had never been in the presence of so much physical cash. Smiling volunteers cheerfully plucked away at the trees, while some would play to the crowd, sinking their elbows deep in a pile of 20 baht notes and coming up with fistfuls, or wistfully holding up a beautifully manicured and densely foliated tree of u.s. hundreds, as though it were a shame to dismantle it.

After over an hour of sustained, climactic giving, Luangta gave the final blessing...

[...]

Did you draw a line, physically or mentally, where you found the 2 main hinges?

Go Back and Do That!

Then, looky looky, here's where I found the 2 main invisible hinges in this
piece:

Hinge # 1: Swinging from Description of a Particular Event to Background Concepts:

Somehow they managed not to turn it into a stampede, with the announcer nervously pleading with the crowd to remain peaceful and orderly, to not 'waste the merit' or 'spoil the merit' and lose it all by getting their hearts into a frenzy at the last-minute and rendering in an instant all their efforts at collecting money, over the past months of time, useless and futile.

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Hinge # 2: Swinging from Background Discussion back to Description:

With the sudden crash of the Thai baht, after months of a failed state effort to keep the market price of the national currency up by buying it back from the global market with the nation's foreign currency reserves, and after the lasting, severe, and shared effects of that defeat across society, it is not geographical boundaries that are the first object of nationalistic focus anymore but the currency itself which is the new 'territory' to be developed and defended, and which transmits the feeling of being bound in a common identity and fate. But it is not as though, despite how recent the dominating equation of money and nation is, there are not already in place ample means by which to work with, and rework, these relations of money and love, and so alter the specific trajectory for growth of the new national money-spirit.

One by one, in rapid succession and sprouting out from the bed of money trees, each bristling tree of cash was placed before the feet of Luangta Maha Bua, who sat impassively on the stage as followers bowed down before him. Big and small trees mixed in the gush forward...

Now let's look more closely at the tool of the Invisible Hinge, in Hinge #1:

Obviously, “invisible” here does not mean undetectable, because you can detect it. It’s invisible because with it you can shift register and scale without having to explicitly point it out and without saying anything about the swing.

Now let’s talk about why: a sudden invisible hinge swings on the turn of an unstated question.

In hinge #1, which swings between description of material to background concepts, we have a relatively coherent description of people in the crowd who have gathered money to donate, have apparently been building up to this moment for a long time, and now there is some dramatic tension—the whole thing might go to waste and be for nothing. But why? They’ve got the money. It’s already there. Real money. It’s going to be donated. Why would it matter if it was given in a peaceful or orderly manner? Why would it be ruined and all for nothing?

That is enough justification to make the switch over to explaining a key operating concept. I don’t need to state any of those questions. And those questions don’t need to be consciously in the mind of the reader for it to operate invisibly. Readers have conscious thoughts and sub-conscious thoughts all the while reading. When I start to explain the background concepts, it’s going to feel like a natural transition. And therefore if I am revising, this invisible hinge gets my approval.

And now for the powerful lesson on the power of one: There are other questions I could ask about these pages of the text. **But I am not revising pages of text!** I am inspecting particular components of the manuscript. If this was a book, I might be spending the next several days inspecting hinges!

What am I NOT doing here?

What I'm Not Doing

Well, I'm not thinking about whether this foray into the conceptual background is reifying a timeless idea of Buddhist concepts and meanings, frozen in an overly conceptual schema in the eternal ahistorical present that tears apart meaning and practice artificially in a way that replicates Western forms of authoritative knowledge, linked to colonial administrative regimes.

I already know that all that is true. I know that because I thought it when I drafted it (at that time thinking, "I'll deal with this later, because I'm just drafting to myself now"), and I know it from previous stages in my revision step-by-step process—I've already decided to go with this approach, for reasons I won't go into but which concern how the ultimate argument of this text does not qualify for that criticism, and because something always needs to be simplified and held stable and fixed in an article.

The good thing here is that we are doing systematic revision. So this has been settled already, and I'm not questioning this now. I already made my decision about that and now I am focusing on hinges. **This is the power of ONE focus. I'm not revising sections of text. I'm revising particular components. I'm only here for one purpose.**

Isn't that liberating? Did a lightbulb just go off?

I can come back and tear my hair out later, or totally change my mind and re-write the whole thing later. But not now. Now I am doing systematic revision.

And now for another awesome lesson about the power of ONE:

But what if I was worried about this hinge? Maybe I got reviewer comments about my manuscript that "It rambles all over the place."

Well, because I have a revision system, I happen to know that comment is very much about hinges, as are several other types of comment. So this IS a good time to think about THAT.

In fact, **because I have a revision system**, I can take pretty much any reviewer comment and know exactly what components to look for and zero in on those particular components to address that particular concern.

In fact, because I know what components effect what kinds of changes, I can also zero in on the tools that will take my manuscript any place I want it to go. For instance, if I took aim like in Lesson 1, I can zero in on what I need to do to get there! Obviously I put Lesson 1 precisely in that place because we don't want to start applying particular tools to particular parts until we know what effect we are trying to get.

You need two things, an aim, and a way to get there.

So let's take the example of the nasty reviewer who says "It rambles." I now know exactly what I'm going to do next!

But First, What I'm Not Going To Do:

Now, am I going to go re-write the whole thing? No.

Am I going to freak out about how in the hell I'm going to make my work more coherent? No.

Am I going to get sad that the literacy and dexterity of that reviewer is so flat-footed, as though the entirety of 20th Century literature never happened? And wonder what the hell I'm doing in academia?

Yes. Yes I will. That's in my emotional make-up. We all have our things.

And now for yet another great lesson about the power of ONE:

You can still live and work with your "things," because you have a system. You can allow those feelings to be there. They won't shut you down. They don't have to go away in order for you to continue working, because all you have to do is focus on your component steps, one at a time. And funny thing is, the feelings will ramp down once you make progress!

In this case, while I'm having my feelings, the other thing I'm going to do is apply systematic revision and go through my hinges and see if I can "strengthen" them.

I put that in scare quotes because maybe I'm actually improving my hinge, or maybe I'm just going through the motions to get past the censors. It depends, but I know I will be doing what I choose to do, and I know I will be able to do what's best for me at the time. Isn't that liberating?

THREE FIXES FOR HINGES

So to strengthen this kind of hinge I have three main tools (and a fourth you'll see in the next hinge, hinge #2).

First, I can adjust wordings, include more details pertinent to the hidden transition questions, to strengthen the invisible hinge. I can leave it as is, but just make it more powerful. In the example I can emphasize the description of crowds teetering on disorder. I can include more speech about not spoiling the merit. I'm sure you get the idea and can think of more ideas. Once you know exactly what the hinge is and ***what is the underlying question on which it turns***, you know how to enhance and emphasize that particular question. It's really not that hard once you break it down, frame it, and see it.

Or Second, I can add in an actual question instead, to be more explicit or to save time because I have to move on and I've got other things to do. I've got options. I can do both, too! I can build in some more question tension, then knock them over the head with an explicit question. Once I know what the function of this moment is, I can do whatever it takes to make it work better.

And Third, I can make a leading signpost statement that directs the reader and explains the path. It could be the horrible "Now that I have talked about X, I will now turn to Y," -- and why not, if you are on a deadline?-- or it can be more context related like "Clearly, it is not the money and gold alone that is the primary value here, because orderly or not, the money is going to get where it's headed. To understand this we need to understand some things about the Buddhist concept of "merit" and how that is functioning in this ritual." I don't love that but if it gets it published, I might decide to go with that. I've got options!

And I can apply all of the above, and add in tool #4 (see below) as well. If I want I can spray it with as much coherence and logic juice that I feel I must.

In any case, let's say the reviewer said you're rambling. You zap that hinge and then you move on down the line to the next hinge, and zip-zap down the line you address the comment in a systematic and strategically targeted manner.

You're not revising pages, you're revising components.

The power of ONE!

Invisible Hinge #2: which also shows us our fix-it tool #4

This hinge is also a question hinge. All hinges are (see also the training on Inquiry-Based Outlines in the bootcamp members area). But this hinge has another set-up which I call the **hair-growing pre-transition**.

It's smoother because it's built up through incremental changes in register which make the swing less abrupt. (And this works great on the literary flat-foot because they lack the literacy to notice how you did it).

Notice the move in the middle of the conceptual background about the Buddhist concept: where it starts to cite a couple prior studies, and then also starts to drift into some historical background of the concepts. While this might be a kind of transitioning itself, it is still not swinging back to the description of the event. It is a pre-transition. It is calling up questions of politics, border, national identity, etc. that are building up the pressure, let us say, to go into the swing back to the event described. So, slowly but surely, there is a movement from pure "Buddhist concept" to a quick exemplary sampling of Buddhist concepts in their historical/political context. This is pre-swinging, because the reader is going to start associating with the described historical event in concern here. Even if it is not conscious, this slow transitioning is now going to make the swing back to the example seem all the more inevitable, natural, and make the swing itself seem less abrupt.

If that next section picks up on threads of politics, border, national identity etc., then those topics raised previously will function as a bridging transition, in themselves, too. Hair-growers and invisible hinges work great together!

And then the real hinge comes.

In this case it was a more explicit hinge, but the whole set up for it was "invisible" in the hair-growing sort of way.

In terms of an inquiry-based beat, the question of the second hinge is: how can money be made to seem a meaningful new territory for the nation? Again, I could just ask that question if I want. Or I could implicitly suggest that there is a way that money can such and such. The question naturally arises in the mind, "well what is that way?"

When the second hinge happens, and it switches to description again, it is like saying: look at this and you will have your answer. And the reader is now propelled forward, has swung into a new room. There is a motivated reading, looking for significance. In surface dimensions, it is the most abrupt transition of the two hinges, yet in other ways there is a lot building up to the switch that makes it more natural than any other.

Or maybe we decide not to go with it after all. Maybe there are still beholders eyes to consider. Maybe you will have the reviewer on your mind saying "you ramble" or "you fail to connect conceptual questions with your material."

But I'm not worried about that because if I'm out of time, I'm going to go straight to the hinges and fix them up. I'm going to enhance how they are working using the 3 tools for hinges, or add the fourth: a hair-growing pre-transition. Or I'm going to put in something more pedantic. Or I'll spray it with a fire hose of tactics. Or I might just say fuck it-- I'm not changing it.

I've done all those things.

The point is, with systematic step-by-step revision procedures you're going to have options and choices with your revision. You can decide. And you have power to do what you want because you have the focus of ONE!

Now You Go:
In the worksheet for this lesson, let's look through some of your text for some hinges, invisible or not, and evaluate them.

Top-Secret BONUS Secret Tip— Ok, now I should really hold this one back but I'm not going to. This is an insider secret and you must use it responsibly!

If you have your step-by-step focus in place, and you know how to fix the right part with the right tool, there are crafty things you can do with this power.

Here's one hypothetical example that is purely hypothetical: if you are really stuck with somewhat illiterate reviewers and don't want to change a certain component, but you have to in order to get past the censorship, then hypothetically speaking you could change it one way to get in press, then change it back the other way during copy-editing. No one will notice. I'm just sayin. Hypothetically. Use at your own risk. The hypothetical point being: if you know the right tool for the right part, all kinds of things are possible!

Great Work !!

And great learning!

In the full workshop, we'll go into way more detail about different components of the text and how to scan for them and how fix them. For example, you will go through all the descriptions in the text, one by one, and evaluate particular aspects of description like setting the scene, populating the scene with backdrops, sets, props, actors, and actions. We can determine when we have too much or too little of this or that ingredient. Or, for another example, we can perform the same kind of laser focus on components in the parts of the manuscript that are theoretical exegeses.

There is a time and place for everything. Revising pages sucks! Fixing the right parts with the right tools rules.

In Lesson 3, we're going to shift the focus more on scanning. Now that you understand the power of ONE, we're going to scan through your entire manuscript and really drive it home how it's possible to revise your manuscript in layered passes, and thus we will learn how to enhance the clarity of aim we first touched base with in Lesson 1.

But first make sure you do the work on your own text of this lesson #2 here, using the worksheet for this lesson. You'll really bring the lesson home. Plus, well... you know... you really need to revise your work and get it published!

Revising can't wait forever because publishing takes a long time and is out of your hands. This is in your hands, now more than ever before. So get out some of your text and get ready to work on it with the Lesson 2 Worksheet!

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

You are going to get there!

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