MAKING MASTERPIECES: EDITING YOUR OWN WORK

A Weekly Workshop
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WHY EDITING IS IMPORTANT

• The best way to get at your good ideas
• The way we encounter and review your work
WHY EDITING IS IMPORTANT

Writing without editing is like building a house without measuring.
EDITING IS REWRITING

“Rewriting is where the game is won or lost; rewriting is the essence of writing.”

- William Zinsser
It was a cold, gloomy day in early April, and a million radios were stricking. Winston Smith pushed open the glass doors of an electric elevator, turned to the right down the passage way and pressed the button of the lift. Nothing happened. He had just pressed a second time when a door at the end of the passage opened and out a smell of boiled greens and old rag mats, and the aged price who acted as porter and caretaker thrust out a grey, scared face and stood for a moment sucking his teeth and watching Winston malignantly.

"List ain't working," he announced at last.

"Why isn't it working?" W. asked, astounded.

"A lift's a working, sir. The currents is cut off at the H.W."

The lift ain't working neither. All currents is cut off turned off by two hundred and ten of its own soldiers and by prisoners of war. "Order!" he barked in military style, and slammed the door again, leaving it uncertain whether the grievance was evidently pending. For that week, the list was seven flights up. Winston, who felt was against Winston, or against the authorities who had cut off the current, acting several times on his own.

Winston remembered now, it was part of the economy drive in preparation for Easter Week. The flat was seven flights up, and Winston, conscious of his thirty-nine years and of the varicose ulcer above his right ankle, rested at each landing to avoid putting himself out of breath. On every landing the same poster was pinned to the wall—a huge, coloured poster, too large for indoor display. It depicted simply an enormous face, the face of a man of about forty-five, with ruggedly handsome features, thick black hair, and...
A PARADIGM SHIFT

Editing is a creative and generative process. Enjoy editing!
STEP 1  Take a break
TAKE A BREAK

• Take a break with purpose
• How will it help you with productive writing?
• Ritualize taking a break from writing
STEP 2  Revise argument and structure
REVISE ARGUMENT & STRUCTURE

Start with the big picture:
  - Does the paper answer the question?
  - Is the paper the right length? The right shape? Organized?
REVISE ARGUMENT & STRUCTURE

Thesis

- Thesis summarizes *argument* + *evidence*
- Do you have one?
- What is it?
- Where is it?
- Is it clear?
REVISE ARGUMENT & STRUCTURE

Affect
- How should this paper affect someone?
- May or may not be explicitly stated
- Often in the conclusion, the style, the voice
- Different from thesis
Original Thesis:

- I think that Origen means that we should not take scripture literally, but rather we should find a deeper spiritual meaning.
In-Process Thesis:

- I think that Origen argues means that we should not take Christians should not read Scripture literally; but rather spiritually. [still needs evidence...]
Better Thesis:

- Origen argues that Christians should read Scripture at a spiritual rather than literal level by mocking the absurdity of literal readings and offering a hermeneutic method of “keys” for understanding the spiritual reading.
REVISE ARGUMENT & STRUCTURE

Original Affect:
- I like Origen.

In-process Affect:
- I want someone to read this paper and see the strength of Origen’s argument.

Better Affect:
- This paper will persuade the reader of the strength of Origen’s position on the spiritual reading of Scripture.
STEP 3

Write introduction and conclusion
INTRODUCTION & CONCLUSION

Be flexible
- Get started. You can always come back
- Can write these during editing
- Need to go back and edit them

Here, your “affect” statement will help you!
- The right level of analysis
- Pay attention to the length
INTRODUCTION & CONCLUSION

Introduction

Thesis
Argument 1
Argument 2
.....

Conclusion
Original introduction:

- We all struggle with how to read the Bible. Origen was born in the 2nd century and lived much of his life in Alexandria. He wrote commentaries on all the books of the Bible, although most of them were lost when his books were burned because later councils decided he was a heretic. However, we can learn something from Origen’s attitude toward the Bible.
Better introduction:

- In understanding the Bible as true, Christians struggle with how to understand the various levels of the biblical text, balancing what is fact and what is truth. Origen, the second-century heterodox thinker, offers a compelling case that understanding truth in the Bible means choosing a particular hermeneutic.
STEP 4

Make transitions clear
MAKE TRANSITIONS CLEAR

• Provide a road map for the reader
• Don’t overdo it
MAKE TRANSITIONS CLEAR

Give signposts:

- Origen offers three examples of the difficulties in a literal reading of scripture. First .... Second... Third and finally...

- However, despite the historical treatment of Origen as a heretic, only a few elements of his theology prove problematic for a contemporary audience.
STEP 5  Revise paragraphs
REVISE PARAGRAPHS

• Relevance
• Unity
• Coherence
• Length
REVISE PARAGRAPHS

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REVISE PARAGRAPHS

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STEP 6
Edit sentences
“An understanding of children’s thinking could achieve improvements in the ability to provide children’s ministry.”
Original:

- “An understanding of children’s thinking could achieve improvements in the ability to provide children’s ministry.”

Better:

- “If we understood how children thought, we could provide better children’s ministry.”
SENTENCES: VARY
SENTENCES: READ ALOUD
SENTENCES: USE ACTIVE VOICE

Original

- “Before dawn the crowing of the rooster could be heard.”
SENTENCES: USE ACTIVE VOICE

Original
- “Before dawn the crowing of the rooster could be heard.”

Better:
- “The rooster crowed before dawn.”
Some theologians, because they write in a style that is impersonal and objective, do not communicate with laypeople easily.
“Some theologians, because they write in a style that is impersonal and objective, do not communicate with laypeople easily.”

“Some theologians do not communicate with laypeople easily because they write in a style that is impersonal and objective.”
SENTENCES: SUBJECT & VERB AGREE

Original:

- “One of those theologians who is always talking about sin.”
Original:
- “One of those theologians who is always talking about sin.”

Better:
- “One of those theologians who are always talking about sin.”
Original:

- “None of us are perfect”
Original:
- “None of us are perfect”

Better:
- “None of us is perfect”
Original

- “Formerly church history was taught using textbooks, while now primary sources are used.”
Original

- “Formerly church history was taught using textbooks, while now primary sources are used.”

Better

- “Formerly history was taught using textbooks; now it is taught using primary sources.”
SENTENCES: PARALLEL CONSTRUCTION

Original
- “in spring, summer, or in winter”
SENTENCES: PARALLEL CONSTRUCTION

Original
- “in spring, summer, or in winter”

Better
- “in spring, summer, or winter”
- “in spring, in summer, or in winter”
Sentences: Action in Verbs

Original

• “During the early years of Christian missions in Scandinavia, attempts at converting Vikings were met with failure.”
“During the early years of Christian missions in Scandinavia, attempts at converting Vikings were met with failure.”

“During the early years of missions in Scandinavia, Christians attempted to convert the Vikings, but failed.”
SENTENCES: DON’T OVERSTATE

Avoid:
- “Clearly”
- “Without a doubt”
- “Obviously”
SENTENCES: AVOID DOUBLE-NEGATIVES

Original
- “not uncommon”

Better
- “common”
SENTENCES: AVOID DOUBLE-NEGATIVES

“A not unbrown dog was chasing a not unsmall rabbit across a not ungreen field.”
STEP 7 Editing words
DELETE UNNECESSARY WORDS
AVOID 1st PERSON PRONOUNS

- “In my opinion”
- “I think”

Exception: “In this report, I will show that the social distinctions at the university are…”
USE SIMPLE, CLEAR WORDS

Avoid

- Pretentious words (“Utilize”)
- Imprecise words (“This”)
- Jargon
- Acronyms
VARY YOUR WORDS

Also

As well

In addition

Moreover
USE THE RIGHT WORD

Among vs. between
Effect vs. affect
Less vs. fewer
That vs. which
USE THE RIGHT WORD

Beware of spell check:

- Their vs. there
- It’s vs. its
- Too vs. to
- Accept vs. except
- Complement vs. compliment
- Principal vs. principle
STEP 8  Title and formatting
1. Risk
2. Thinking about Risk
STEP 9  Re-Read
STEP 10 Peer-review
PEER-REVIEW
ACTIVITY

Practice Self-Editing
ACTIVITY

Revise:

- Argument, structure, and transitions
- Paragraphs, sentences, and words
The Multiple Facets of Ritual: A Review of Catherine Bell's *Ritual: Perspective and Dimensions*

Although activities that we would consider rituals have taken place for millennia, the study of ritual is a relatively recent phenomenon. Catherine Bell, a professor of Religious Studies at Santa Clara University who has written a number of books on ritual, examines the field of ritual studies in *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. We are particularly interested in the contribution that Bell's book could make to the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls. With its thorough overview of ritual studies, its emphasis on the complex nature of ritual, and its interesting discussion of ritual density and change, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* could help us to gain insight into the rituals and prayers from Qumran.

There are a number of aspects of the book that could be helpful for the study of Qumran prayers and rituals. Firstly, Bell succeeds in presenting a thorough and accurate overview of ritual studies. The scope of her book is broad, but with her expertise in the field, Bell is able to systematically introduce the many issues, debates, and areas of inquiry that make up the modern study of ritual. Throughout the book, Bell offers fascinating examples that help one to understand the concepts she is discussing and make the book a pleasure to read. Qumran scholars, who may not have a background in ritual studies, could benefit greatly from the overview that Bell provides.

Bell's thesis that ritual is a complex and varied cultural construction, rather than an intrinsic and universal aspect of human behavior, is also significant for Qumran scholars. Bell uses the structure of her book to demonstrate her thesis. She highlights the different explanations of ritual behavior (part 1), the different types of actions seen as
rituals (part 2), and the complex relationship between ritual and social life (part 3).

Through her discussion of the shifts that have taken place in understandings of and
approached to ritual, Bell demonstrates that discussion of ritual often reveal more about
the ritual theorists than they reveal about themselves. As Qumran scholars study the
rituals in Dead Sea Scrolls, they should consider Bell's insights that ritual is a modern
western category reflective of our own presuppositions.

Bell also raises a number of minor points that pertain to the prayers and rituals at
Qumran. Her discussion of the problem of ritual density (i.e., why do some societies have
more rituals than others?) could provide insights into the Qumran communities, where
rituals seem to abound (e.g., Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, calendrical rituals, and the
Covenant Renewal Ceremony).

*Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* provides a thorough yet succinct overview
of basics and complexities of ritual studies and offers a number of insights that are
relevant to the ritual texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls. One hopes that all those who are
studying the rituals and prayers at Qumran will take the opportunity to deepen their
understanding of the material by reading Bell's book.
CONCLUSION

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REFERENCES


