Notes from Faculty Revision Workshop, 1/22/13

Help students become more self-conscious about the revision process.

Define explicitly what constitutes successful revision—you have refined your thesis; you have reorganized the discussion; you offer more complex analysis (deepening/broadening, …); **vs.** you fixed the spelling mistakes.

This definition can be done on an individual basis, or you can present general problems and solutions to the class as a whole.

Dramatize the difference between "corrections" and "revisions" by having them do some ungraded correcting of surface errors of grammar and style.

Give meaningful feedback on big issues, rather than getting bogged down with details. When we read a draft and mark every little wording and grammar mistake, the students can get the mistaken impression that they just have to fix everything that is marked, and the paper is an A. One idea for avoiding that is to put all comments on the front page or on a separate sheet, and include the message that—in addition to substantive changes—there are numerous grammar/usage...... issues that must be addressed.

In our upper level science classes we are helping the students learn a new kind of writing. Provide examples of good work, both by former students in the course and by professional scientists.

Create sequences to assignments/build a semester framework for revision: begin with a focused discussion of content—what does this text say? Then an analytical discussion—how do you evaluate that argument? Or, ask first for a statement about the project, then a literature review, then analysis, etc.

Show samples of clear, accurate summaries of the material in class as models of good writing and a means to be sure that everyone understands the material. (MT policy: I will contact the writer in advance; present material anonymously; make it clear I only choose examples of successful writing; then I ask "what does this writer do well? What could this writer do to make the paragraph even better?")

Before the semester begins, figure out how **you will manage the drafting/revision process, including grading strategies,** and communicate your policies to students.

Variations on revision:

Require a cover sheet where writer explains what has been done. This resonates well with upper level science writing-in-the-discipline classes because it's exactly what we do with journal revisions.
Or ask writer to highlight changes

Or ask the student to make a case for being allowed to revise: present a plan of attack. Then check the revision against the plan, looking for follow-through.

Or ask the writer to include a note about "what I would do if I had more time."

Or ask students to do something specific, such as read another article and incorporate it, or condense the discussion by ¼, or to identify an objection to their thesis and address it, or require that the paper acknowledge a new perspective.

Ask them to change the thesis—take the other side.

Ask students to write an abstract of their paper/lab/piece.

Ask students to prepare a piece of writing for an external audience (newspaper, gov't. official, grad school application).

Create false deadlines: In class on Wednesday, when paper was due, say it's actually due Friday, so everyone gets an extra two days to revise/polish/rethink, ….

Give a short assignment at the beginning of the semester; have them return to it and revise it near the end.

NOT every revision needs to be seen by the instructor. Ask students to select and revise one paragraph or the introduction or the conclusion. Make it clear that this will help them in future writing.

Ideas for Discussing Writing in Class: (economies of scale!)
Hand out a discussion about the writing process—this could be from a handbook on writing (Hjortshoj, *The Transition to College Writing*, for example) or from a professional writer in your field, talking about the process.

Use as a **model of good writing an article** that you are already planning to discuss for content: talk about how the writer manages the introduction or the conclusion or the literature review, the organization, etc.

Set an example of really **good writing in your field** against an example of really bad (professional) writing in your field.

Discuss the significance and choices necessary for writing to a specific **audience**. Assign a range of audiences.

Set aside a class meeting for **peer review**. Models of what kids should do available through Writing Center. Collect peer review forms with final drafts. Reward students who undertook this task seriously. (It's just good for them to see each other's writing; may also produce better, because "public," first drafts.

In class, have students exchange drafts and outline another student's draft ("reverse outlining").

Use ten minutes at the beginning of class for people to look over their finished papers. Ask them to correct any errors they see or to provide a note about what they are pleased with and what they are dissatisfied about.

Make clear to students that if the paper doesn't improve, it's not the instructor's fault.

Each writing-intensive course ought to exist within a department-wide strategy for teaching writing in your field. Have your department hold those conversations.