

First Year Writing Program, Yeshiva College, Fall 2015

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For many incoming college writers, the expectation of revision can be daunting. Completing an essay is often seen as challenging and time consuming enough; figuring out how—or why—to rewrite it can, at least at first, seem frustratingly superfluous. Furthermore, because students think in such individual ways, write with such different tendencies, and come into college with such varied experiences of reading, there's no one way to revise or to teach revision. However, because revision is such a fundamental aspect of the writing (and thinking) process, it has long been a priority among the skills First Year Writing courses aim to help students develop.

With the elusive nature of revision in mind, we recently focused our assessment efforts on trying to better understand student experiences of revision.

We knew, going in, that across all sections of FYWR, students have the same opportunities for acquiring feedback. They may engage in peer review sessions, visit the Writing Center, and/or discuss work-in-progress with their professors. As FYWR instructors, we hope that all of these interactions help students develop more confidence in and understanding of how to make improvements to their work. What we didn't know, though, was in what ways this feedback translates into concrete changes in student essays.

At the end of the Fall, 2015 semester, three FYWR instructors collected a random pool of student work, for which each sample included both an original draft or essay and a revision. Based on our goals and outcomes for the course, we created a rubric that distinguished between students being able to identify the need for revision and students being able to effectively implement revision (based on evidence including but not limited to expanding, deleting, and reorganizing).

Each instructor then read both the original and the revision of each sample, scoring the work of the other two classes (meaning no one scored her own students' writing). We started off with a "norming" session to ensure commonality across our evaluations.

In general, it was very interesting to see the range of what students changed. Specifically, it became evident that the students who made the most dramatic and the most successful changes to their work had been given two separate assignments, with two separate grades, and comprehensive instructor feedback between versions. Furthermore, as part of the work for the course, this same group of students also read and discussed academic articles about the revision process. In this way, it was exciting to see how the metacognitive consideration of revision directly supported and informed individual student choices and willingness to make global, "big picture" changes.

For all the professors involved, this assessment proved worthwhile. Revision is a messy process, which can be hard to measure. Yet, due to our assessment efforts, we were also able to determine specific, tangible measures, such as earning separate grades for separate versions and reading more about the revision process, to utilize across sections.