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Sequenced Peer Revision: Creating Competence and Community

Mastering techniques of self- and peer revision is a valuable tool for all writers, especially US-educated Generation 1.5 students, whose near fluency enables them to dialogue successfully about their writing. Using action research, 2 academic writing instructors systematically trained students to more responsibly and effectively revise their academic essays. Fostering student buy-in to the editing process, sequencing rubrics over a series of essays, and establishing a productive role for the teacher during peer revision were all features of this process.

Introduction

We teach academic writing at Santa Barbara City College, which in 2011-2012 was named one of the Top 10 Community Colleges in the US. It was also awarded a $3 million federal Title V grant as a Hispanic-serving institution, with Latinos comprising about 80% of our ESL population. Among the challenges in working with these writers is how little they use the college's support tools, such as tutoring programs and a writing center. It seems that "only the teacher needs to edit and grade my work" is the prevailing perception.

In a collaborative effort, we conducted action research to compare our tasks and results from two upper-level ESL writing courses taught simultaneously in Spring 2012 with particular attention to these US-born immigrant students. We sought to record how effective a sequenced peer-revision system was for US-educated multilingual students, particularly one that exploited their oral fluency during in-class revision tasks. In tracking the results, we paid close attention to students' growing competence as peer revisers by recording what peers were writing and saying to each other in their review sessions. We also followed how their conferences influenced the subsequent drafts of their papers. Our exploration to put the "P" back in process writing resulted in more purposeful classroom relationships characterized by increased competence and community.

About Sequenced Peer Revision

When upper-level writers were first asked to revise each other's work, confidence issues sometimes arose. These varied from "I'm not qualified" or "I can't

find anything wrong," in the early weeks of the course, to overly confident peer reviewers who led their classmates astray, replacing Error A with Error B or substituting correct writing with mistakes. For feedback about their classmates' writing, we noticed that initially our US-educated immigrant students were reticent about writing comments on their peers' papers because of the perception that a written comment is more formal or final than a conversation. Since US-educated multilingual writers clearly demonstrated a higher comfort level with oral discussions about their peers' writing, issues of content and organization often took precedence over specific grammar-focused matters because macrolevel comments really lend themselves to group discussions. This is a deliberate teaching strategy for peer revision. For example, after completing a targeted textbook exercise about "what makes a good thesis statement" or "how to write a topic sentence with a statistic," it was easy to examine an essay with just the thesis or topic sentence in mind. A peer-revision task that asks you to read only the thesis statement in, say, five other essays, is achievable and models how writers should examine single parts of their own essay. At the beginning of this process, some students expressed fear and dread connected with the idea of identifying mechanical errors and were relieved when they did not have to correct all the grammar errors in a partner's essay.

Interestingly, our US-educated immigrant students proved very capable in leading small group discussions. So, in the advanced class, we followed a regular revision cycle of focusing only on macro comments for the first and second drafts. Although it helped to encourage students to correct their own grammar errors anytime they caught them, we tried to adhere to a practice of not worrying about the grammar, punctuation, spelling, and formatting errors until the writer had gathered all ideas and parts of the essay. Grammar comments were usually left to the teacher and/or tutors.

While many of our following examples focus on macrolevel changes, we did transition into some microlevel editing during class time. In the advanced class, we used editing stations several times during each semester (see Figure 1). Editing stations can be used for either macro- or microlevel revision but, most important, we introduced them so that students chose *one* area in which they felt more confident as revisers and as a fertile environment in which to build mutual trust as revisers.

How to Sequence Peer Revision

A deliberate sequence that is carefully scaffolded will build writers' confidence in peer revision and, ultimately, in revision of their own work (see Table 1). Interestingly, we noticed that the first two steps of the process moved quickly with our US-born immigrant students. Once they reached Step 3, the teachers needed to build in repetitive tasks to reinforce competency.

Table 1
Peer Revision Sequence

Step	Competency Objective	Suggested Activities
	By the end of this stage, writers will be able to …	
1: Train peer revisers	• … comfortably step out of the "writer or classmate" role and into a "reviser" role using academic vocabulary and concepts.	• "Find someone who" • Interest-generating tasks
2: Revise one aspect only	• … establish a pattern of asking and answering questions about one part of an essay in order to improve it.	• Checklists that don't require written comments • Examination of one part (i.e., title, introduction, etc.)
3: Revise multiple aspects	• … recognize elements of the essay they will be graded on. • … revise on multiple levels (macro- and micro-) by creating specific comments.	• Short-answer or multiple-choice questions • Practice tasks related directly to material from textbook or class.
4: Go deeper with writer-specific feedback	• … formulate direct, constructive, personalized revision comments, taking another writer's purpose and grammar into account.	• Editing stations (with students' writing) • Discussions in which explanations are practiced
5: Self-reflection and assessment	• … compose paragraph-level and sentence-level comments, praise, and suggestions for improvement on a piece of writing (their own or others').	• Journals/ reflective writing • Peer-peer grading • Self-grading

Train Peer Revisers

Early in the semester, we emphasized tasks to build trust and confidence in the community of writers while accustoming our writers to a variety of revision tasks. One approach to train competent revisers is to point out revision practice activities in the textbook and elicit the purpose along with effective examples of how to respond to them.

For example, a warm-up exercise worked well to introduce *the idea* of peer revision with a "Find Someone Who" discussion about one sample essay that all students had read and revised for homework:

Find Someone Who ...

Spent more than 10 minutes editing this essay.   _____

Knew what things to look for when editing.   _____

Checked if all the key parts of the essay were there.   _____

Started by correcting grammar and vocabulary errors.   _____

Wrote at least one positive comment.   _____

Referred to Chapter 1 in the textbook while editing.   _____

Wrote comments in a language other than English.   _____

In another "Find Someone Who" after a writing assignment early in the semester, we generated interest in how to format a paper.

Find Someone Who . . .	
Descriptor	*Person's Name*
Used 12 pt. font	_____
Used Times New Roman font	_____
Set 1.25" margins	_____
Headed the paper	_____
Centered the title	_____
Indented the paragraph	_____
Double-spaced	_____
Started the paragraph with a topic sentence	_____
Used the word "example" somewhere in the supporting details	_____
Referred to a person somewhere in the paragraph	_____
Quoted someone somewhere in the paragraph	_____
Used the word "conclusion" at the end of the paragraph	_____

Role-Play. To address the issue of US-educated multilinguals' not using college tutoring services, Ingrid role-played an "ineffective conversation" versus a "model conversation" between a student and a writing center tutor in front of the class, showing what types of questions produce the most effective feedback from tutors. The tutor came to class, where we performed this live listening exercise with students, using a listening comprehension task so that students could analyze the conversation.

Sample Role-Play Between Instructor and Tutor in Front of Class

Note down what questions the student (played by the instructor) asked about her essay.

Student: Hi! I was wondering if you could help me with my cause-and-effect essay for Writing 5?

Tutor: Sure! Have a seat. What were you wondering about?

Student: Well, I don't think it's very good.

Tutor: OK. What parts are you unsure of?

Student: I don't know. I think everything is bad.

Tutor: Really? Well, let's take it one step at a time. Are you having problems choosing a topic?

Student: No. I'm writing about why students take on part-time jobs. But I need help with my introduction because it's not dramatic enough. Do you think it's dramatic?

Checklists. Early in the semester, checklists proved useful for training students as peer revisers and sent a clear message that revision is crucial. They demonstrated what any competent writer must do before handing his paper in and required only yes/no answers from revisers.

Editing Checklist

Check your partner's essay. Are the parts there?   ***Yes***   ***No***

1. Advanced-style thesis?
2. Interesting and brief title?
3. At least three steps included in this process?
4. Steps of process in chronological order?
5. At least one example or experience included?
6. Three topic sentences?
7. At least one transitional expression used?
8. Academic style used throughout the essay?
9. Long enough?

Revise One Aspect Only

At the beginning of the course, we intentionally controlled and limited the peer-revision questions to single aspects of the paper, so students would know exactly what kind of comments to make. For example, this sample early task for the advanced class guided students to focus only on the introduction. After answering these few questions, students were encouraged to briefly conference with each other.

Editing Introductions: Seven Types

We have just studied seven types of introductions. Now, you will help your classmate improve the introduction to his or her essay.

Step 1: Read your partner's introduction. What type is it? _____
Step 2: Is it one of the seven types? Which one? Is there something missing to make it complete?
Step 3: Discuss ideas for improvement. What is your most important suggestion?

Revise Multiple Aspects

Our US-educated multilingual students' comfort level with peer revision grew quickly after the early tasks. As the semester progressed, we expanded to revision of more than one part of the essay, introducing both short-answer and multiple-choice questions.

Peer Review: Basic Outline for Cause-Effect Essay

Sit with your partner(s). Read the outline and write your answers to these questions. You will be graded on this review. (5 points)

Does the list of ideas in the outline have at least three different causes or effects in complete sentences?

Yes	No

(Circle one): The thesis statement is

Weak	Working Thesis	Advanced-Style

The first cause or effect is

Unclear	Clear but Too Obvious	Interesting/New Idea

The second cause or effect is

Unclear	Clear but Too Obvious	Interesting/New Idea

The third cause or effect is

Unclear	Clear but Too Obvious	Interesting/New Idea

We gradually asked readers to add some input to a paper in two of the revision questions (c and e) below. However, the majority of the questions are still multiple choice. All of the metalanguage used refers directly back to exercises we have just completed in our textbook.

Peer Editing: Main Body Cause/Effect, Draft #1

Your name: _____ **Writer's name:** _____

Today's editing goal: *Help your classmate improve his or her main body. Answer the questions. Use the textbook and class notes to assist your partner. Write detailed responses. You will be graded on your editing comments.*

After you read the main body, answer below:

a. How many different causes/effects are explained?
      2   3   4   more than 4

b. Is the main body long enough (at least 2 pages)?
      Yes   No

c. Add a triangle to any sections where you think more details will make the paragraph clearer or more interesting. Follow the example on page 37. How many triangles did you add? _____
      2   3   4   5   6   more than 6

d. Read the "Expressions for Summarizing" on page 44. Circle these expressions in your partner's paper. How many did you find?
      0   1   2   3   4

e. Find two places in the body paragraphs where you think the ideas will be clearer with summary statements. On the paper, write a sentence your partner can use in each location. Also, write your sentence ideas below:

In all of these sample revision tasks, students are specifically checking their peers' essays for elements we have practiced in class. The answer choices, however, are still limited and point to shared error types in the class that were noticed by the instructor.

Go Deeper With Writer-Specific Feedback

At this stage, revisers are experienced enough to go beyond multiple-choice questions and offer direct, constructive comments. In the following sample task, we copied sentences from students in the class (anonymously) to tailor an activity that trains revisers how to competently analyze a grammar point using grammar terminology instead of just reformulating the sentence for the partner. What the US-educated multilingual students gained from this

exercise went deeper than just validating the importance of each writer's sentences. It also pulled them out of a common trap of relying only on their oral proficiency to reformulate another person's idea instead of analyzing to figure out what was wrong with the original sentence. This task sent the message that a reviser respects each writer's words *and* strives to analyze the original sentence to help the writer revise that sentence.

Which Kind of Errors Are These? From Your Definition Essays

To be happiness, we need to get good life.
      a) Part of speech and verb tense   b) part of speech and article

Some people say being happiness is just being good person.
      a) Part of speech and verb tense   b) part of speech and article

In conclusion, nobody knows the truth until all things she addressed is verified.
      a) Singular/plural   b) article

Another deep-revision activity, called "editing stations," challenges each student to commit his expertise to *one* area of revision. As each writer's paper is passed from station to station, an isolated revision topic is discussed in small groups and recorded on a feedback sheet that is stapled to each paper. By the end of this highly engaging revision task, each writer has received comments on five or more topics and benefitted from reading multiple essays.
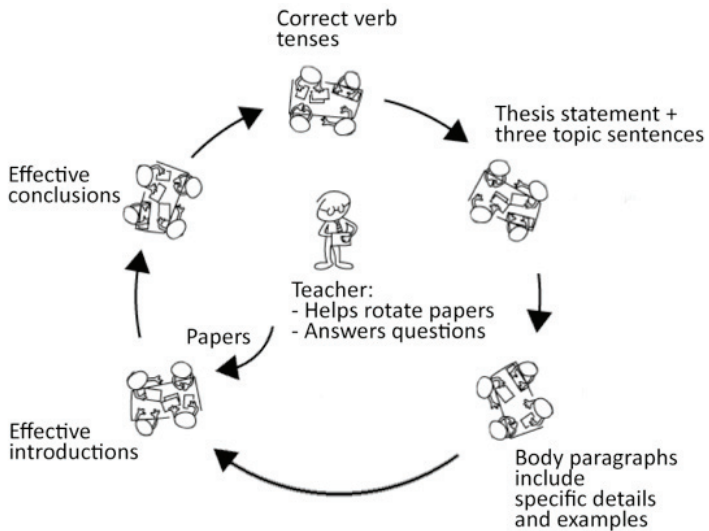

Figure 1. Editing stations.

Using recorded student comments throughout the semester, we repeatedly motivated the class with examples of effective comments they had written to each other. For example, in the advanced class, we displayed sentences using a clicker presentation with PowerPoint slides. Clickers are one way to ensure that each student voices a response to a discussion question, such as, "What does this comment tell the writer to change in his introduction?" Clickers increased student participation and modeled detailed revision conversations. Additionally, we were introducing our US-educated multilinguals to the discussion approach using clickers that content teachers on our campus are widely using in lecture classes. In both clicker-generated discussions and written revision comments, our students were encouraged to use metalanguage (such as *topic sentences, thesis statement,* and *dramatic introduction*), especially since our textbook and the teacher were using these terms. However, it was also accepted when students commented less specifically, such as when they referred only to "this sentence." In the example above, our discussion revealed that it is most important to tell the writer *how* to improve a sentence.

Self-Reflection and Assessment

We graded self-reflection tasks to train writers to compare their own areas of improvement or weakness from one draft to the next and, as the difficulty of revision questions increased, so did the students' ability to independently write more detailed comments. In the 12th week of the semester, a Generation 1.5 student named Antonio wrote this about his classmate Hugo's title: "Your title is too short and it is not interesting. You should select an interesting title using the word "gene" and some important information from the topic sentence for example "genes make me laugh." Angelica, an upper-intermediate writer, progressed from brief peer feedback comments to this: "The best part of the outline is the paragraph 2, because give the first, and important reasons what are effects of fast food on health."

In a batch of peer-review comments from Week 13 of our 16-week semester, the effectiveness of several was striking. All of these advanced-level comments could have come from the instructor, yet students had written them to each other. One student was using precise language to review the controlling idea of each paragraph: "Good idea, but not really clear example. It is hard to understand how your friend's luck connected with his genes." A maturity of comments was demonstrated by this positive reinforcement from one writer to another: "It's a good topic sentence. The whole paragraph talk about why genes is important."

Content interactions between the students were also impressive, such as when Maricela wrote to Farida (regarding the topic sentence): "It's kind of confusing. I did not get it if you can more clear about topic that's better. [Regarding the conclusion] You start talking about disappearance of their wedding that's a you didn't say before and that's new." Precise language and a probing question were evident when Cariño wrote to David: "In thesis statement you should say about what you're gonna talk about not example." "Do you believe mother should stay home or should work? I didn't catch it." Cristina also used precise

language for Olga: "Both paragraphs 2 & 3 look like the same support ideas for me. You can think different." Clearly, the grammar of these comments is not correct, but as writers evaluated the components of the essay, they applied their learning to their own and a partner's work.

Arranging Groups for Peer Revision

Who a person's revision partner is will partially determine the result of the review process. A group that experiences peer review positively early on in the semester is more likely to embrace sequenced peer revision as a viable tool. We successfully experimented with multiple approaches, and collected some student reactions to the groupings, often noticing that our US-educated multilingual students naturally gravitated toward working together. Pairing by personal preference has potential for productive partnership, but peer revisers sometimes got too familiar with each other, leading to complacency about the task or getting off-track, so we found it most effective to rotate pairs for revision. This chart (see Table 2) of approaches to arranging peer-revision groups addresses competence or community as a deliberate objective.

Table 2
Approaches to Peer-Group Arrangements

Grouping Criterion	Objective	Benefit
Random	Enhance community building and trust: Should be regularly varied.	Easy to organize effectively when teacher doesn't know students well.
Learning styles	Competence oriented: US-educated learners familiar with oral conferencing techniques or writers with same learning style can comfortably work together.	A little observation of who the auditory, kinesthetic, visual, and tactile learners in class are greatly enhances effective grouping.
Language level	Community building: Pair work varies group dynamics; strategically pair students based on similar fluency or accuracy level.	Allows you to pair up an emerging/struggling writer with a more experienced one; beneficial if two writers have same native language.
Same gender or nationality	Competence oriented and trust building: To recognize that men's style of communication can be very different from women's; exploit same-culture revision groups at times, even if L1 is used.	Creates a safe space where writers immediately have something in common; switches up the usual classroom dynamics.

Creating Competence and Community

Sequenced peer revision sets up increasingly challenging tasks that are scaffolded in a way to lead students to interact academically within the context of their writing. Assigning letter or numerical grades for the peer reviews started simply with credit for the completion of paperwork and participation in the discussion. However, we also progressed to grading our student writers on competence, which we measured through the increased *quality* and *thoroughness* of comments. For example, in instances where specific questions were asked, students needed to offer more than yes/no answers to receive credit. In writing programs such as ours, where students have had some exposure to basic peer review in Levels 1-3 of our program, we aim to refine their process in the upper levels. It was not sufficient to merely comment on a classmate's paper. Instead, we were looking for these criteria:

a) Macrolevel Awareness

(Regarding an argumentative essay on working mothers) "Do you believe mother should stay home or should work? I didn't catch it."

"The outline is very clear give the most important reasons of fast food when are healthy and unhealthy and how can be the fast food and addiction for many people."

b) Paragraph-Level Comments

"You need to add this part (counterargument/refutation) in your essay."

"Both paragraph 2 & 3 look like the same support ideas for me. You can think different."

c) Sentence-Level Comments Using Specific Terminology

"Your hook can be better than that and thesis showed that your against it. Is it true? But your topic are saying different."

"You should write you restate thesis." (In the conclusion)

d) Praise

"Good, because you used 'first,' 'second,' and is easier to read."

"You write three examples. All of them support your topic."

e) Concrete Suggestions for Improvement

"Maybe some people don't know the place—North Dakota. You can explain it to the reader."

"You need to write about Mexico's beaches."

During the course of the semester, we witnessed how our community of Generation 1.5 and international writers had bonded broadly with peers because they had interacted significantly with everyone in class. This was evident when students arrived in class each day and when they left. Although they naturally gravitated toward others from the same language group, they were increasingly willing, and even eager as the term progressed, to interact with a wide range of classmates, both academically and socially. Students got to know each other better personally, and as writers, through peer revision. The more we facilitated a nurturing working relationship among our students, the better they were able to stay on task when assigned to work together on a revision. Fostering healthy working relationships between our US-educated multilinguals and international students through peer revision was deliberate and invaluable as we sought to solidify a community of writers. One student commented:

> It's a good way to work because you get more new ideas about your essay and then you feel more comfortable to show your work and talk to new people. It's a perfect way to work in class, and it helps you to get new friends." (Oscar)

The US-educated multilingual writers demonstrated leadership skills and were especially helpful and confident peer revisers. In fact, our Generation 1.5 writers were so receptive to oral input from the teacher and classmates that they modeled key study skills to our international students.

For trust building, the "interested reader aspect," or people reading your work and actually responding to it, should not be underestimated, because our community college students often struggle with a lack of motivation to rewrite their essays for only a teacher to read. When Ty read Yumi's essay describing "*mori* girls," she responded by running over to the computer to look up a picture of this Japanese fashion trend that she had never heard about. That type of unbridled reader response builds a community of writers who want to revise together.

In sum, we were delighted with the results of establishing a strong, sequential peer-revision component of our writing curriculum that also formed part of their class grade. Particularly in exploring sequenced peer revision with our US-educated immigrant students, we thought and talked a lot about meaningful learning and teaching of college writing—teaching that moved beyond the mere mechanics of finding grammar errors or grading draft after draft. We reexamined the student-learning objectives of our respective courses with regard to competency, and we found instances in which our US-educated multilingual writers could become more proficient editors of their own work. Students in our classes interacted candidly and animatedly, critiquing and/or affirming each other's work, defending their choice of argument, sentence structure, and vocabulary use, learning to be self-revising because of their peer revision experience.

In carefully planning and implementing a sequential presentation of the process of peer revision, and then further sequencing the presentation of skill

areas for students to master, we observed that students developed, step-by-step, facility in the revision process, and they completed the course with competence and a sense of community. Given time and training, our students came to form a nurturing, supportive, independent, and interdependent skilled community of writers.

Authors

Ingrid K. Bowman holds an MA in TESOL and a German graduate degree in Political Science. She splits her time as a lecturer at the University of California, Santa Barbara and Santa Barbara City College. With more than 25 years of international experience, she has taught in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the US and now serves as an English language specialist for the US Department of State. Ms. Bowman was raised in a trilingual home (German, Russian, and English) and has studied French, Spanish, Cantonese, and Arabic. Her work focuses on academic writing, student-centered learning, methodology, and materials and curriculum development.

John Robertson (MA in TESOL) has more than 30 years of classroom teaching experience, including 15 years internationally—in Mexico, Egypt, Indonesia, and Malaysia. In his 11 years as a regular classroom teacher in the upper elementary grades of California public schools, Mr. Robertson mentored many Generation 1.5 students in developing their writing. At Santa Barbara City College, where he teaches Reading and Writing classes at the upper-intermediate to advanced level of the ESL Program, Mr. Robertson is always alert to facing and addressing the challenges of mastering the writing process. His special interest in understanding and working with Latino students is reflected in the AA in Spanish that he completed this year as well as his recent publication of a study guide for the video series, The Buried Mirror *(Microangelo Education Media), which deals with Spanish influence in the Americas.*

Appendix
Recommended Reading

Ferris, D. R. (1999). One size does not fit all: Response and revision issues for immigrant student writers. In L. Harklau, K. Losey, & M. Siegal (Eds.), *Generation 1.5 meets college composition: Issues in the teaching of writing to U.S.-educated learners of ESL (*pp. 143-157). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

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