

Project-Based Learning in the Writing Classroom
 Ryan Madan, Associate Teaching Professor of Writing and Rhetoric

Example #1: Revision of Wikipedia page

Revision: ~3 pgs. single spaced (the length if you printed out the webpage)

Reflection: ~4 pgs. double spaced

Due: May 3rd by 11:59pm (uploaded to Canvas)

The purpose of revising the Wikipedia page is for you to improve a document out there in the world, one that, if made easier to read, could be an even better reference to those looking for information. A second purpose of this course project (just as important) is to allow you to demonstrate that you've fulfilled course learning objectives—that you can apply course principles appropriately and purposefully in a particular rhetorical context. To fulfill these goals, the final project is a two-part assignment: revision and reflection. You'll see that both the revision and the reflection will be scored separately. But you should think of them as intimately connected, and you should work on them side by side (rather than revising first and reflecting second). If you reflect *as you write*, rather than after the fact, that reflective awareness can help you refine your writing decisions.

The Revision

Goals:

- Revise a Wikipedia page in your technical field to make the sentence-level writing more clear, more accessible, easier to understood and use. Make those stylistic changes without compromising the accuracy of the content or the intentions of the original document.
- Demonstrate a mastery of revision principles from *Style* that we've discussed this term—both on the sentence level and the level of passages. That is, write objectively clear and concise sentences, and objectively coherent/cohesive passages.
- Make your revisions “live”; i.e. change the actual webpage using Wikipedia's editing feature.

Pitfalls:

- Don't “cherry pick” changes, revising only the worst sentences in the page. Every sentence probably deserves *some* change (in word choice, punctuation, eliminating unnecessary words, for example). And remember that you aren't revising in a bubble: a change of tone in one paragraph will probably change the way the next paragraph works.
- Beware your impulse to rewrite passages from scratch. If you delete the original text—rather than working with it—you might a) commit many of the same stylistic snafus found in the original and b) prevent yourself from referencing (in your reflection) specific changes you made to improve the original text.

--Rubric for Revision--	
Quality of Revised Text How much has your revision improved the original? (Notice that this is different question from <i>how much</i> you've changed, since you could change a lot and make things worse rather than better.) Do you demonstrate you can apply our course principles?	x/25
Thoroughness of Revision Degree to which you made substantial changes to the original (a question of effort and scope, not quality).	x/10
Revision Total	x/35

The Reflection

Goals:

- Write a reflection that shows you to be a thoughtful and purposeful reviser, one that *justifies* your revision choices 1) based on the general advice offered by *Style* and/or 2) based on your analysis of the “rhetorical situation” (the writer's goals, the reader's needs, and the pressures of the topic and writing context). Can you thoughtfully articulate why you made the changes you did, what your



options were, and why ultimately chose to do X over Y? Give *specific* accounts of the changes you made and what those accomplished; be *accurate* in your diagnosis and reference to course concepts. Show knowledge of your own limitations—feel free to discuss weaknesses in addition to strengths.

- Help us understand your justifications/explanations by referencing examples of the revised text alongside the original. Don't just *tell* us what you did, *show* us so we can confirm your claims, and so we can feel the impact of those changes. You might even consider showing us multiple changes of the same passage so we experience your decision-making journey as writers.
- Organize the Reflection around themes or common threads of revision. Bring together changes under those themes (for example, changes on pages 1, 2, and 8 may all demonstrate the same commitment to X—talk about them together!) and prioritize for us what was most interesting, difficult, rewarding, or effective aspects of your revision.

Pitfalls:

- Don't try to talk about ALL of your changes. Focus your reflection on the most meaningful revisions rather than listing everything.
- Demonstrate your claims with examples, yes, but don't swamp us with examples that you don't explain. For this reason, avoid relying on long block quotes from your revision.
- Don't organize your reflections chronologically, based on order. Doing so would mean you aren't synthesizing your changes—repackaging them—for the benefit of our understanding.

--Rubric for Reflection--	
Quality of Analysis Thoughtfulness, depth, specificity, accuracy of your reflection. Does your analysis accurately label the changes you've made? Does it thoughtfully account for what is at stake in those changes in terms of emphasis or meaning or "feel"?	x/5
Considering Audience and Genre Do explain your changes in relation to how you imagine the reader's needs and how you imagine what's appropriate to this genre/setting?	x/5
Use of Examples (from your text and original) Providing useful examples to illustrate your reflective claims.	x/5
Focus Providing your reader a <i>framework</i> through which to understand your revision choices.	x/5
Reflection Total	x/20
----- Revision + Reflection Grade	x/55

Example #2: Revision of Sponsor Document

Revision of *Student Guide to Academic Integrity*. Length and format is up to you!

Reflection: ~5 pgs. (double spaced)

Due: May 3rd by 11:59pm (via myWPI dropbox link as two separate files)

The ultimate goal is for your team's revision to influence—or even become—the newest draft of WPI's *Student Guide to Academic Integrity*. But this final project also needs to fulfill our course learning objectives, allowing you to demonstrate your ability to apply course principles appropriately and purposefully in a particular rhetorical context. To fulfill these goals, the final project is a two-part assignment—revision and reflection—both of which you'll produce as a team. You'll see that both the revision and the reflection will be scored separately, but you should think of them as intimately connected and work on them side by side



(rather than revising first and reflecting second). Your reflection itself can and should shape the writing decisions you make.

The Revision

Goals:

- Deliver a document that serves WPI students, one written in a style that’s accessible, easily understood, and useful. Make those stylistic changes without compromising the accuracy or intentions of the original document.
- Deliver a document with a consistent vision, a consistent identity (like it was written and revised by a unified voice). Don’t produce a revision that feels fragmented and choppy (like four separate people wrote it without consulting each other!).
- Demonstrate a mastery of revision principles from *Style* that we’ve discussed this term—both on the sentence level and the level of passages. That is, write objectively clear and concise sentences, and objectively coherent/cohesive passages.

Pitfalls:

- Don’t “cherry pick” changes, revising only the worst offenders in the document. Every sentence probably deserves *some* change (in word choice, punctuation, eliminating unnecessary words, for example). And remember that you aren’t revising in a bubble: a change of tone in one paragraph will probably change the way the next paragraph works.
- Beware your impulse to rewrite passages from scratch. If you delete the original text—rather than working with it—you might a) commit many of the same stylistic snafus found in the original and b) prevent yourself from referencing (in your reflection) specific changes you made to improve the original text.

--Rubric for Revision--	
Quality of Revised Text How much has your revision improved the original? (Notice that this is different question from how much you’ve changed, since you could change a lot and make things worse rather than better.) Do you demonstrate you can apply our course principles?	x/25
Thoroughness of Revision Degree to which you made substantial changes to the original (a question of effort and scope, not quality).	x/10
Revision Total	x/35

The Reflection

Goals:

- Write a reflection that shows you to be thoughtful and purposeful revisers, one that *justifies* your revision choices 1) based on the general advice offered by *Style* and/or 2) based on your analysis of the rhetorical situation. Can you thoughtfully articulate why you made the changes you did, what your options were, and why ultimately chose to do X over Y? Give *specific* accounts of the changes you made and what those accomplished; be *accurate* in your diagnosis and reference to course concepts. Show knowledge of your own limitations—feel free to discuss weaknesses in addition to strengths.
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Use of Examples (from your text and original) Providing useful examples to illustrate your reflective claims.	x/5
Focus Providing your reader a <i>framework</i> through which to understand your revision choices.	x/5
Reflection Total	x/15

Revision + Reflection Grade	x/50