the orbital region: re-visioning

dory nies

foreword by rebecca taplin

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foreword to
the orbital region: re-visioning

The written word looks perfect. The uniformity of the digital image and the labored exactitude of the printed page depend on aesthetic seamlessness. Pages are designed to optimize the readability of text, not the visibility of a typeface. And the perfection of the letter and the word can lead us to feel that our writing must be perfect from the moment it becomes visible. Dory's article references Naomi Shihab Nye's notion that we deserve the process of revision to put forth our truest meaning—this is a declaration against the perfectionism of text. What matters here is not the aesthetic of language or text, what matters is the heart of the words.

Revision is the most critical part of my writing process because in actively seeing again, I intentionally cast aside my inherent perfectionism and choose to value my ideas and my voice above all else. Revision enables not just my words to be seen, but it makes my thoughts and meaning visible. As I revise and re-see my writing, I let the mess of words and forms be messes, and I get to make my thoughts shine most. This is no time for perfection.

} rebecca taplin

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If a teacher told me to revise, I thought that meant my writing was a broken-down car that needed to go to the repair shop. I felt insulted. I didn't realize the teacher was saying, "Make it shine. It's worth it." Now I see revision as a beautiful word of hope. It's a new vision of something. It means you don't have to be perfect the first time. What a relief!

- Naomi Shihab Nye

There is a maxim that even the best writers struggle with the process of writing, but this struggle is never apparent! What we read and take in on a daily basis is often the final stage of writing. In other words, you never see the drafts and scratched-out notes and outlines a published (and revised) piece of writing goes through before you hold the final stage in your hands and drink it with your eyes. The myth is that writing *well* is a painless process. With this article I hope to dispel this myth.

It's ironic that I'm writing a piece possibly trying to convince you, the reader, about the pleasures of the revision process. It's ironic because I clutch and cling to the words I'm finally able to force through my fingers down through the pen onto paper, or through the keystrokes onto a monitor lit with light and memory. I cling to the words that finally end up on the page, and I resist the idea of taking any of them away, because I fear the more I pull the writing apart, the more it will unravel until I am left with only the ashes of my initial ideas.

The poet Naomi Shihab Nye speaks to her feeling of hope when she realized that to revise is to be more effectively heard. With words we make sense of our learning experience, particularly at Evergreen. I had a similar experience to the one Nye shares in the above quote. My first quarter at Evergreen I was writing short argumentative essays. I would consistently get the drafts back from my faculty with comments like, "You need to convince me." I resisted the

notion that I had to do anything else to prove what I felt were very obvious and succinct arguments. I felt proud of the writing I had done, and I was afraid that I would have to start from scratch if I wanted to rise to the challenge my faculty had set before me.

With practice and time I developed methods for this pulling apart, this unraveling of ideas, to actually get deeper into the ideas. One thing that propelled me was the realization that my faculty was actually saying, "It's worth it for you to convince me." I reveled in this challenge. Sure, it was exasperating, and frustrating; it meant I had to sit back down and sometimes start from scratch. It meant I had to get messy, which is really hard for me. It meant I had to let go of the words, ideas, and quotes I thought made the most sense and sometimes find all new evidence, or dump whole paragraphs. But it also meant that what I had to say mattered, and how I said it mattered even more.

Perhaps you have already read the other Writing Grid articles. I hope so, dear reader, because reading about these other parts of the writing process may finally help you see that writing is not all about a finished product. The Writing Grid exists to illuminate all the stages of writing, because the truth is, you can start from anywhere and get somewhere. The stages of writing are subtle, and they flow into one another. In an attempt to give you a technical definition of revision, I will say that revision should mostly consist of conceptual, textual, and transitional changes. All those mechanical and grammatical changes? Yes, they are a part of revision, but they are tertiary. Revision wants to focus on ideas, not commas or font changes or just cutting and pasting your paragraphs to different places.

Most writers start with an introduction and end with a conclusion, and everything in between is pat and in place. Start with A, go to B, then C, then D, and then you're done, and you hand in your paper, and when you get it back it says, "Too many commas" and "This isn't how you use a semicolon." Nye suggests that the revision process entails letting go of