

# Here's why students don't revise what they write – and why they should

May 4 2021, by Narmada Paul

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When high school students get into the habit of revising their writing, it has a [positive impact](#) on the [quality of their work](#).

Despite the proven benefits of revision, students often [resist making changes](#) to the initial versions of what they wrote—because it requires [additional effort](#). Or, if they do revise, they only do it in a [mediocre way](#).

Finding ways to motivate students to revise their writing is crucial given that only [27% of 12th graders in the U.S.](#) write at a level that is "[proficient](#)." Proficiency in writing refers to correct spelling and grammar, logical presentation of ideas and appropriate use of details and evidence.

Learning how to revise one's writing is something that will serve students well in a variety of ways. Research shows that while writing is an effective way to help students learn [content in different subject areas](#), revision helps them to [develop a deeper conceptual understanding](#) of the topic on which they are writing.

## College and career

Revision is also a vital part of preparing a college application essay. Students who have made it through the college admission process say that they [spent considerable time and effort](#) revising their essays. In light of the fact that many colleges have [made the ACT or SAT optional](#)—

[especially during the pandemic](#)—these essays have become all the more [important for a student's college application](#).

Writing is also recognized as an important professional skill [beyond high school](#). Digital forms of written communication are used in [80% of blue-collar and 93% of white-collar jobs](#). [Revision](#) is [key to mastering the writing skills](#) required in a world where [virtual work](#) is increasingly common.

## Diversity in student motivation

Given the clear benefits of learning how to revise one's work, how can students get motivated to invest the time and effort it takes to do a meaningful revision? As a [researcher who focuses on motivation](#), I did a study with colleagues in 2021 that [offers insights](#). I found that it all comes down to the reasons a student has to write well.

Some students want to improve their writing skills, while others worry about how well they are performing in relation to their peers. Keeping these motivational differences in mind, here are five ways to create the best conditions for students to revise their written work.

### 1. Reduce anxiety

Anxiety is accompanied by negative thoughts and physical discomfort, which can diminish a student's ability to concentrate during writing. Writing anxiety can also make students [reluctant to review their writing](#). It is important for students to accept that writing well takes effort and that [feeling anxious about writing is normal](#). Creating a [classroom environment](#) that encourages students to seek help can make students [less anxious](#) and lead them to [improve their writing](#).

## 2. Select topics of interest

Unless students see writing as a personally useful activity, they may not feel motivated to revise their work. [Writing genres](#) that allow students to explore their interests can motivate them to write well. [Research shows](#) that structuring [enjoyable writing experiences](#) in the classroom can make students open to revising their writing.

## 3. Build confidence

Students' beliefs about their ability to write well can [influence whether they revise their writing](#). One of the [most effective ways](#) to make students feel confident about their writing ability is to provide them with opportunities to experience success as they develop their writing skills. Students are likely to feel successful when they achieve their individual goals through writing, overcome personal obstacles to writing and receive [positive feedback](#).

Writing assignments that require significantly more skills than a student currently has may make them doubt themselves. But if [challenging writing tasks](#) are designed to build on previously mastered skills, they can increase students' confidence.

## 4. Focus on improvement

Research indicates that students who focus on learning and improving their writing skills tend to [revise more](#) than students who focus on comparing themselves to others. Whether students choose to focus on improving or outperforming others is [influenced by the direct and indirect messages](#) they receive in the classroom from their teachers. Teacher efforts to promote learning and improvement are especially critical given the inherently [competitive](#) and [stressful](#) nature of high

schools, where social comparisons are inevitable.

## 5. Rethink grading practices

[Grading practices](#) that go beyond simply giving students a final letter grade or a score on a writing assignment are effective in reducing anxiety and encouraging revision. When writing assessments involve [purposeful feedback](#), it can help students understand how to revise their writing to reach classroom learning goals.

In the case of complex writing tasks, breaking the task down into mini assignments can give teachers the chance to provide feedback at each step of the way before students submit the complete written product for a final grade.

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