

Study Guide

# REVISION DECISIONS

Talking Through  
Sentences and Beyond

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## Summary

Revision is often a confusing and difficult process for students, but it's also the most important part of the writing process. If students leave our classrooms not knowing how to move a piece of writing forward, we've failed them. *Revision Decisions* will help teachers develop the skills students need in an ever-evolving writing, language, and reading world. Jeff Anderson and Deborah Dean have written a book that engages writers in the tinkering, play, and thinking that are essential to clarify and elevate writing.

Focusing on sentences, Jeff and Deborah use mentor texts to show the myriad possibilities that exist for revision. Essential to their process is the concept of classroom talk. Readers will be shown how revision lessons can be discussed in a generative way, and how each student can benefit from talking through the revision process as a group. *Revision Decisions* focuses on developing both the writing and the writer. The easy-to-follow lessons make clear and accessible the rigorous thinking and challenging process of making writing work. Narratives, setup lessons, templates, and details about how to move students toward independence round out this essential book. Additionally, the authors weave the language, reading, and writing goals of the Common Core and other standards into an integrated and connected practice.

The noted language arts educator James Bitton once said that good writing “floats on a sea of talk.” *Revision Decisions* supports those genuine conversations we naturally have as readers and writers, leading the way to the essential goal of making meaning.

This guide is formatted as a study group. It could be used either with a group of teachers or individually as a reflective structure for those reading the book alone. The suggestions offered in the guide are designed to foster collaboration, spark new thinking, and support the transfer of new ideas into the classroom.

## Part 1: The Basics

### Chapter 1: Revision Decisions Are Possible: Actively Processing to Develop Options for Revision

#### Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- When you think of your students and revision what comes to mind? Student attitudes? Successes? Challenges?
- How do you support writers in decisions about their first words?
- What are your guiding considerations in creating an environment for making decisions about revisions?

#### Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read “Principles for Making Revision Decisions” (9–15).
- How is this thinking about revision decisions similar to yours? Different?

#### Toolbox Strategy: Revision Decisions in Action (15 Minutes)

- Write the following sentences on a board or handout. Ask participants to “play” by combining the following sentences. The goal is to say the same thing with less words.
  - You need to understand oil.
  - We must begin with the key rule.
  - This is a key rule of science.
  - Change alone is changeless.
- Read pages 7–9, “Revision Decision in Action.”
- Table Discussion: What did you notice? What did you wonder?

#### Quotes Worth Discussing (10 Minutes)

*Sentence combining is about playing with ideas and shaping them into effective syntactical patterns that make sense for individual writing situations: sometimes long, sometimes short (5).*

*Revision is where writers get their wings, their flexibility, their effectiveness (6).*

*Writing Next (Graham and Perin 2007) clearly points us toward sentence combining as one of the eleven research-proven methods highlighted to*

*effectively develop writers in grades four through twelve (6).*

*Revision of sentences most certainly sinks without talk (12).*

**Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)**

What is one idea/concept that you will continue to think about after today and might integrate into your writer's workshop?



**Part 1****Chapter 2: The Vocabulary of Revision Decisions:  
Introducing DRAFT with a Five-Day Lesson Plan****Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)**

- What strategies do you find successful in supporting the revision process?
- What role does talk play within the revision process?
- Reflect on the guiding principles that Jeff and Deborah use in creating an environment for revision (9). Share your thinking.

**Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)**

- Read pages 17–19, “Introducing DRAFT with a Five-Day Lesson Plan.”
  - Delete unnecessary and repeated words.
  - Rearrange parts/chunks.
  - Add Connectors.
  - Form new verb endings.
  - Talk it Out.
- How do you see DRAFT working within your classroom?

**Toolbox Strategy: DRAFT (15 Minutes)**

- Distribute copies of the reading excerpt from *The Race to Build—and Steal—the World’s Most Dangerous Weapon* by Steve Sheinkin (19).

*He had a few more minutes to destroy the evidence.*

*Still in pajamas, Harry Gold raced around his cluttered bedroom, pulling out desk drawers, tossing boxes out of the closet, and yanking books from the shelves. Everywhere he looked were incriminating papers—a plane ticket stub, a secret report, a letter from a fellow spy.*

*Gold ripped papers into shreds, carried two fistfuls to the bathroom, grabbed the rest of the pile, and stumbled on slippers down the stairs to the cellar, where he pushed the stuff to the bottom of an overflowing garbage can.*

*The doorbell rang.*

- Have participants break into small groups to try out the DRAFT strategies. Have each group try out one of the letters and its corresponding revision strategy.
  - Delete unnecessary and repeated words (18–22).
  - Rearrange parts/chunks (22–25).
  - Add connectors (25–33).
  - Form new verb endings (33–36).
  - Talk it Out (36–37).
- Ask participants to share: What did you notice? What did you wonder? Were there any challenges?

### **Quotes Worth Discussing (10 Minutes)**

*Revision needs to have a sense that a window of possibility is still open to allow another draft in (17).*

*Sentences are a writer’s tool, and their positioning demonstrates relationships in the way that best fits our mood and message (17).*

*The power of talk in the language arts classroom can’t be overstated. Revising sentences is one more place where we need to talk it out, ensuring our writing makes sense, ensuring it’s economical and pleasing to the ear (38).*

### **Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)**

What is one idea/concept that you will continue to think about after today and might try out in your classroom?

**Part 1****Chapter 3: The Process:  
The Anatomy of a Revision-Decision Lesson****Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)**

- Have you tried DRAFT with your students? How did it go?
- Have you noticed any changes in your students and their willingness to revise?
- How has your thinking shifted as a result of reading Jeff and Deborah's ideas around revision?

**Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)**

- Review Figure 3.1, "Revision-Decision Lesson Structure" (42).
- Reflect on the structure of the lesson.

**Toolbox Strategy: A Lesson in Action (15 Minutes)**

This is an opportunity for participants to try a lesson using the lesson structure that Jeff and Deborah outline in the chapter. The example of the lesson is threaded throughout the chapter. You will want copies of Appendix A–E for participants. Appendices F and G can also serve as resources for the group. Ask participants to work through the following lesson in groups of two. Share with the group as participants work through the components of the lesson.

- **Context:** How can you put more action in a sentence? Look at these two versions in Appendix A. What do you notice?  
(Pages 43–45 show what this looks like in the classroom.)
- **Points of Emphasis:** See Figure 3.4, "Elaborated Points of Emphasis with Links to the Text."
- **The Demonstration:** What are some possibilities for combining the first set in Appendix B.  
(Pages 48–50 show what this looks like in the classroom.)
- **The Practice:** What are some ways we could revise the cluster of sentences in Appendix C? What are some things to think about as you do?  
(Pages 51–53 show what this looks like in the classroom.)



- **The Collaboration:** Each group can work with a different cluster from Appendix D. Revise your cluster into one or two sentences using the DRAFT strategies. Create two options for each cluster. Ask each group to report on one revision option, going in order of the clusters.  
(Appendix E is the original excerpt from *Flesh and Blood So Cheap* by Albert Marrin.)
- **Application:** This is where participants are nudged to apply new learning to their own readings and/or writing. Encourage this extension between sessions.

### Quotes Worth Discussing (10 Minutes)

*Learning happens at the point of use, and this practice is ripe for teachable moments (50).*

- Ask participants to use a draft of writing. This can be an unfinished draft or free write in a journal.
- This is an opportunity for participants to try out and apply a few strategies on their own writing.
  - Find a part of your writing you want to revise.
  - Use DRAFT actions to make a piece of your writing stronger and more clear.
  - Write a brief reflection about using DRAFT.

### Quotes Worth Discussing (10 Minutes)

*Research-based instruction (Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock 2007) reminds us that comparison-contrast is the most effective teaching strategy across all curriculum areas (43).*

*Here is one of those times I need to remember the adage ‘The one who is talking is doing the work.’ The most important part of these activities is letting students discover as much as they can (44).*

*The demonstration gives teachers a chance to model thinking and decision-making at the point of revision. Recasting sentences, using replicable strategies students can also use, is the goal of the demonstration. As Cris Tovani (2000) says, we make the invisible visible (48).*

**Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)**

What do you plan to try in the future but haven't attempted yet?



## Part 2: The Lesson Sets

The lessons that follow in the rest of the book explore a variety of craft principles and grammatical structures. The lessons follow the pattern of the context through the application. Part two of the text is designed as a scaffold for you to use as you need it.

It is recommended that the structure of the study group shift to take on the structure of the lessons outlined in the rest of the book. This is a sample structure that could be used to work through lessons in a professional development setting.

### **Lesson Set 1: Modifying in the Right Direction: Right-Branching Sentences**

#### **Context (10 Minutes)**

What is the context for the lesson? Read pages 59–60. Refer to Appendix 1.1.

#### **Points of Emphasis (5 Minutes)**

Identify possible points of emphasis. What does this mean?

#### **The Demonstration (10 Minutes)**

As the facilitator, model the demonstration for the group or have participants read the demonstration section on pages 61–62.

#### **The Practice (15 Minutes)**

Have participants play with the sentence clusters (Appendix 1.2) with a partner. Have groups use the DRAFT strategies to delete unnecessary repetition, rearrange sentence chunks, add connectors, or form new verb endings. Have participants write two revisions and, starting with the one they like best, talk the sentences out with their partner to make sure the sentences make sense.

#### **The Collaboration (15 Minutes)**

Distribute the sentence sets (Appendix 1.3) based on the book about World War II, Laura Hillenbrand's *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*. Sentences are grouped into clusters that can be revised into

one sentence. Groups revise their assigned sentence in at least two ways and then select their favorite. Groups then share their sentence, displaying each so that everyone can see and putting them all in order as a paragraph, revising for flow as needed. Compare the group's construction to the original text (Appendix 1.4).

### **The Application (5 Minutes)**

Ask participants to collect three right-branching sentences and be ready to share with the group at the next meeting. Examples of right-branching sentences can be found on pages 65 and 66.

Another extension for participants would be to go back to their personal writing and create or revise a few right-branching sentences. Reflect on how the structures strengthen their writing.

