

Revise with Confidence Free Video Series

Video #3: Use Simple Tools

Transcript

Hey, welcome back. This is the third of three videos in the free Revise with Confidence video series, and because each one builds on the one that came before it, it's important for you to take a look at the first and second videos in the series if you haven't already done so. You'll find a link just above this video, so do please do watch those before coming back to this one.

In the first two videos, we took a look at the first and second steps in the simple three-step process for determining once and for all if your writing is really any good. As a reminder, the 3 steps are:

1. Gain Fresh Perspective – on why you worry in the first place
2. Distance Yourself – so you can see yourself as a writer more objectively
3. Use Simple Tools – that will help you advance your skills as a writer

Gain Fresh Perspective + Distance Yourself + Use Simple Tools = You as A More Confident Writer

In that first video I hope you were able to Gain Fresh Perspective on yourself as a writer

- The speed-happy culture in which we're all operating, the rush to crank out a draft and publish quickly, which can lead to sloppy writing that *isn't* all that good;
- The psychology behind the self-doubts so many of us have about the quality of our work,

how they began in childhood, when we're primed from an early age to have low self-esteem

- How the culture of rejection in which we operate can damage our confidence
- The fact that our initial writing probably *isn't* terribly good, and that that's okay
- How you're not alone and are in fact in good company with thousands of writers like those I've worked with, who have pushed beyond their concerns to invest in themselves as writers in order to ensure that their writing is the best it can possibly be, people like Shannon Huffman Polson, Tim Queeney, Maureen C. Berry, and SK Lamont
- The need to reframe the question, from "is my writing really any good" to "how can I ensure that my writing is as good as it can possibly be?"

In the second video we looked at

- Distance Yourself – so you can see yourself as a writer more objectively – not being fully aware of the type of writer you are is one of the critical things that can get in your way of making sure your writing is as good as it can possibly be.
- We explored
 - what to do if you don't like your own writing – your equivalent of the funny writer or NH writer and the choices you have for getting beyond writing "lite" –
 - quit,
 - fret,
 - face the truth,
 - refuse to settle
 - combination of 2-4

- we looked at ‘self-handicapping’ and how that might be getting in your way of being the best writer you can be

In today’s video we’re going to be looking at a variety of simple tools you can use to advance your skills as a writer.

I’ll share with you some of the tools I’ve used to advance my own skills as a writer, to progress from a novice writer constantly worried my writing wasn’t any good, and getting rejection after rejection, to a published writer; I now work with words and with writers like you every single day from here in the shed.

We’ll take a closer look at and learn from the examples of those four writers I’ve mentioned.

You’ll take some time on your own to think through the tools you’re already using to advance your skills as a writer, and determine which new tools you’d like to invest in to ensure that you do all you can to make your writing as good as it can possibly be, because don’t forget – you’re no longer asking “Is my writing any good?”, instead you’re asking “How can I ensure that my writing is as good as it can possibly be?”

I’ll also give you a sneak preview into my premium online companion course to this video series called *Revise with Confidence: See Your Writing Like an Editor*, which uses this same simple 3 step process we’ve been talking about in this video series, and applies it to your writing

1. Gain Fresh Perspective – on your own writing

2. Distance Yourself – from your own work so you can see it more objectively, like an editor, and with that objectivity, you'll ...
3. Use simple tools – self-editing tools that you can apply directly to your writing so you can confidently revise your work.

I am going to be opening up enrollment soon so I'll give you more details about that in a few minutes.

But for now, let's jump right in and talk about using simple tools to advance your skills as a writer. There are three basic categories I encourage you to focus on:

1. Study
2. Practice
3. Get Feedback

And then do it all again – study, practice, get feedback. As you watch this next bit, I encourage you to jot down any notes or ideas that arise, because shortly I'm going to ask you to pause the video and do some reflecting on what tools you're already using to advance your writing skills, and what tools you'd like to add.

Think about all the tools you can use to study:

- **Read!** Books in the genre in which you're writing, craft books, books that inspire your creativity, books by authors who are particularly good at the things you'd like to learn.
Below in the resources download you'll find a link to a list of books I most often recommend if you'd like to check it out.
- **Take courses and workshops!** Enroll in online courses like my Revise with Confidence

course or the hundreds of other great online courses that are out there, take an in-person workshop or a class at the local university or adult education program, enroll in a degree-program focused on creative writing.

- **Watch videos!** Like these videos, great TED talks, instructional videos in places like Lynda.com.
- **Use Your Library!** Tell your librarian what you're looking for and let her or him guide you to all kinds of study tools.
- **Attend writing conferences and retreats.** There's no better place to snatch up some new tools than at a writing conference or retreat – I guarantee you'll never walk away without some new tools in your toolbox.
- **Google it!** I'm always surprised by the number of people who don't simply type their burning questions into their browser's search engine – having trouble with dialogue? Go to google and type in "writing great dialogue" or "how to write good dialogue" and then read all you can get your hands on.

Next, practice. What is there to say about practice? Sit yourself down at the writing desk and write. Complete writing exercises and assignments that you've uncovered as you've studied, copy writers whose work you admire so you can tease apart their sentences, their characters, their structure, their plot, look words up in your dictionary and thesaurus and check grammar and punctuation uncertainties as they arise – I love Grammar Girl for this. You'll find a link to her in the resources download below. Beyond all else, keep writing. Write, write, write!

Finally, get feedback. From other writers individually, in writing workshops, from professionals

like me, from people who are great readers in your genre, through online critique forums ... find people to read your work. Don't already have people who can read for you? Take a look below and you'll find a link in the resources download for Working with Readers that might be helpful. Also, learn how to be a better reader of your own work. There are myriad ways you can get distance on your own work so you can see it more objectively, like an editor. That's exactly what we do in the online companion course Revise with Confidence. We explore 11 different methods for gaining fresh perspective on your own writing and distancing yourself so you can see your work more like an editor. We also dig deeply into 5 specific self-editing tools that you can immediately apply to your own writing. I'll give you a closer sneak peek into the course in a few minutes.

But first, let me share with you some of the tools I've used over the years to advance my own skills as a writer, in case some of my experience sparks some ideas for you about what you might do next. Before the end of the video we're going to pause and give you some time to reflect on what you've done, and on what you need to do next to advance your writing skills, so jot down any notes you'd like to capture as you listen to my story – there might just be something in my story that you've not already considered for yourself.

- The year after Antioch, in 2006, I applied for and got a grant from the NH Arts Commission to work 1-1 on my novel with author Brad Kessler, author of the novel *Birds in Fall* and the non-fiction book, *Goat Song: A Seasonal Life, A Short History of Herding*, and the *Art of Making Cheese*. He read *Vigilant* and told me it was the “research draft”, which meant I had added in all this great stuff I had learned while doing

research, which he then told me I had to strip out and use it simply to inform the characters and the story. Back to the drawing board.

- Right after Antioch I also gathered together three Antioch friends and we made a pledge to keep each other on track through monthly check ins about our writing lives, develop six-month contracts about what we planned to do in our writing lives over the next six months, and read each other's work whenever we needed readers.
- And then, on the strength of my Antioch experience, and my increasingly confident skills as a writer, I finally had my first story published, seven years after that first Grub Street workshop. Wild Swan was a finalist for the Fulton Prize, and was published in the Adirondack Review in the fall of 2007. I was invited to read the story in New York City, at the NY Center for Independent Publishing.
- Lest you think one thing led really nicely to the next, here's a look at all the rejections I got before Wild Swan was accepted – 39 of them! And these are also rejections from other story submissions I received before they went on to be published. What was I saying in the last video about how this writing business is rife with rejection? I am no stranger to it.
- But Wild Swan led to me getting a full ride scholarship to the 2008 Key West Literary Seminars, where I worked with author Lee Smith in an Advanced Fiction Workshop. Lee and the workshop members read the opening of Vigilant, and once again, as with Bruce, Lee encouraged me to keep going: “Well,” she said in her lovely southern drawl, “this is perfect - now you just have to finish the damn thing.” I did finish it, and that's the novel that's currently sitting on a shelf, even though it was a finalist in several novel competitions, because too many literary agents told me they couldn't sell it in that

particular publishing climate because it was “too quiet, and too literary” and after trying for years I set it aside to focus on the next novel.

- After Wild Swan, Alligator Juniper published *Leaving the Ledges*, which was a finalist in their fiction competition, that story I began under Bruce Machart’s tutelage seven years earlier, and that was followed by a string of publications from 2009 - 2014, fiction, non-fiction, flash fiction and short memoir, and then I stopped submitting to focus on finishing my second novel, formerly called *Prelude*, now called *This is How It Begins*. While I was writing this novel I applied for and received a significant research grant from the Elizabeth George Foundation to work on this novel, which was another major boost in my writing career. I was able to live and work for a month in Warsaw, Poland, and spend time doing research at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum’s wonderful archives. The full manuscript is currently being read by a number of literary agents, and I’m also seriously considering publishing the novel independently.

So what does my story have to do with you? First of all, I hope you made note of some of the ways in which I invested in the tools I needed to advance my writing skills, and how I touched on each of the three categories: study, practice, and get feedback.

I applied for and received funding so I could study – with some accomplished writers, at the Key West Literary Festival, and during a month and a half away from my day job where all I had to do was study and work on my novel. Mind you, there were many, many grants I applied for and didn’t get, but I did get a few, and each one of those advanced my skills immeasurably and led me to the next thing. I also submitted and submitted and submitted my work to scores of literary

journals until my work was published. And one thing that was instrumental to my learning, is that throughout all this time I also invested in my continuing education. I paid to attend three different AWP conferences – in Vancouver, New York and Washington, DC, and I paid to attend several writing retreats here in Maine. I bought and read and studied scores of books. I enrolled in several online courses on both the craft of writing and the business of writing. And during all of those years, I kept writing, and I kept sharing my work with my Antioch group and other trusted readers.

I hope hearing about my experience also helps you to feel companioned. We all choose different paths, but we all ultimately want the same thing: to write and be read. Because while I was progressing through all those wonderful years and all those learning experiences, I was sometimes discouraged, and I sometimes questioned whether my writing was really any good, and whether I was just wasting my time, and my money. But here's the deal. No matter how discouraged I got, there was still nothing I loved more than sitting down at the writing desk and mucking around with words and stories. I never once lost sight of that magical feeling I experienced for the first time – and have had countless time since - in that first Grub Street Writers fiction workshop, when that character named Poke appeared to me and demanded that I write his story. I have been investing in my writing life ever since and I'm grateful for every moment of it.

Before I ask you to pause to reflect on your own writing life journey let's take a closer look at the four writers I've mentioned, so you can learn from their experience, too. Each of these writers – Shannon Huffman Polson, Tim Queeney, Maureen C. Berry and S.K. Lamont –

decided to further invest in their writing lives by coming to me for guidance about how to see their work more objectively, like an editor.

- Shannon Huffman Polson, you'll remember, is the author of the memoir *North of Hope: A Daughter's Arctic Journey* and a series of essays, *The Way the Wild Gets Inside: Field Notes from Alaska*. Shannon is currently finishing up another terrific memoir about her time as an army pilot, and it was great to work with such a serious writer who is so eager to continue to learn and grow, despite her already capable skills. She came to me because she could no longer identify which details in her manuscript might benefit from an additional look – she couldn't see clearly because of her proximity to her own effort. Now she's able to see sentence level opportunities for improvement as well as thematic gaps she can now fill in. Learning how to see her work more objectively, like an editor, will help her not only with this memoir, but with her next book, and her next. Shannon told me that she feels like her work is now stronger on every level. I encourage you to take a look at her website – I've included a link on the downloadable resources page, below.
- Tim Queeney is the author of the novel *George in London*, a novella - *The Borealis Incident* - for Steve Konkoly's Perseid Collapse Kindle World, and a trilogy of Perry Helion thrillers. Tim's currently working on a new novel entitled *The Brooklyn Devil*. It's set in 1969 in NYC and Connecticut. The main character is a WWII veteran whose son is a prime age to go to Vietnam. Like Shannon, Tim sought me out so he could get a fresh look at his own work. He was able to confirm that his intention behind his work was coming through, which he wasn't certain of, and that there were still a few things he

could clarify, and that by clarifying, he could also apply similar clarifications to different areas in the rest of the manuscript. You can find a link to Tim's website on the resources download below.

- Maureen C. Berry, is the author of *Salmon: From Market to Plate*, as well as the forthcoming *Shrimp: From Market to Plate*, and a memoir *Hurricanes, Handcuffs, Pepper Spray & Scrambled Eggs*. Maureen sought me out with questions about her forthcoming Mick Delgado crime thriller and came away feeling like she could finally see where she was overwriting and where she was underwriting. Knowing how to identify for herself where to streamline her prose, and when to amplify it, will serve her exceedingly well with the rest of this manuscript and with future books. Take a look at Maureen's website – you'll find a link in the downloadable resources page below.
- S.K. Lamont is author of the forthcoming novel, *Katie Reeves and the Dragon's Heart*, and what a terrific story it is! S.K. wanted to be able to read her story as a reader instead of as a writer, and identify any writing habits that might be getting in her way of improving her work. Now she's able to distance herself and see *Katie Reeves and the Dragon's Heart* through fresh eyes, and she can see one particular point of view peccadillo that she'll now be able to avoid while revising the rest of her manuscript. Check out S.K.'s website, too – the link is below on the downloadable resources page.

Nothing makes me happier than seeing writers invest in themselves, learn something new that they can immediately apply to their own work, and then see immediate improvement.

NOW, let's pause and think about you. I would love to learn more about what your experience has been. Take a few minutes to think about your answers to these questions:

- What have you already done to advance your skills as a writer?
- What learning experiences have you invested in that were well worth it?
- When you reflect on all you've done in your writing life so far, what makes you most proud or happy or excited?

Think about the variety of tools we've talked about in each of the three categories – study, practice, get feedback.

Do share your thoughts in the comments section below if you're comfortable doing that – your answers might also spark some new ideas with other writers who are participating in this video series and of course you can browse through and see what other writers are sharing as well.

Pause the video now to reflect on and answer these questions in the comments section below, and then come on back.

Welcome back.

We've spent a fair amount of time together over the last several days, thank you. Here is your key takeaway:

- There's no reason for you to keep worrying about whether or not your writing is any good, or you're wasting your time or you'll have nothing to show for all your hard work.

You learned in the first video that

- The rush to crank out a first draft and publish quickly can lead to sloppy writing

that *isn't* all that good;

- and that your initial writing probably *isn't* terribly good, and that that's okay
- You considered the importance of reframing the question, from “is my writing really any good” to “how can I ensure that my writing is as good as it can possibly be?”
- You explored the psychology behind the self-doubts so many of us have about the quality of our work, how they began in childhood, when we're primed from an early age to have low self-esteem
- How the culture of rejection in which we operate can damage our confidence
- You also learned, though, that you're not alone and are in fact in good company with thousands of writers like Alice Munro, and those I've worked with, who have pushed beyond their concerns to ensure that their writing is the best it can possibly be, people like Shannon Huffman Polson, Tim Queeney, Maureen C. Berry, and SK Lamont

In the second video you heard about the dangers of not being fully aware of the type of writer you are, and how that can get in your way of making sure your writing is as good as it can possibly be. We took a look at:

- How to step back and figure out what to do if you don't like the style of your own writing

You know now that you can:

1. Quit
2. Fret
3. Face the Truth

4. Refuse to Settle
 5. Or some combination of #s 2-4
- You looked at the psychological tendency called ‘self-handicapping’ that’s both protecting you, and getting in your way, and you heard that you are able to choose to push beyond that tendency, like you’re doing right now by participating in this video series.

And finally you’ve had a chance today to explore a variety of tools in three different categories that will help you advance your skills as a writer.

What does all of this add up to?

You’ll remember that my goal for you by the end of this series was to help you get beyond your worries so you can focus on your writing instead, and do what’s necessary to ensure that your writing is as good as it can possibly be. I hope by now that you *have* gotten beyond your worries, and that you’re turning your attention to your writing itself. Today we certainly explored a lot of different ways in which you can invest in your writing life and advance your skills as a writer.

Very soon I’m going to be showing you how you can take what you’ve learned during this video series and expand on it so you *can* get straight to work and focus on your writing, because soon I’m going to be opening up enrollment for my premium online companion course, Revise with Confidence: See Your Writing Like an Editor.

Full details are coming soon, but inside the online course you’re going to apply the *same* simple

three step process we used during this video series directly to your writing itself, which will allow you to see your writing more objectively, as if you were an editor, so you can confidently revise your work to make sure it's as good as it can possibly be.

In the Revise with Confidence online companion course you will

1. Experience 4 different ways to Gain Fresh Perspective on your writing so you can be more open-minded about your own work
2. Experiment with 7 different methods for Distancing Yourself – from your writing so you can see it more objectively, like an editor
3. Use 5 Simple self-editing Tools – that you can learn and apply immediately to your own work so you can instantly experience the benefits of what it feels like to confidently revise your writing.

Inside the course

- To get you set up and in the right frame of mind for learning, you'll decide which piece of your own work you'd like to focus on throughout the course, and you'll check in with yourself on your attitude towards the revision process
- you'll watch a sometimes mind-blowing video that will give you insight into what kind of observer you are and what that means about the way you might want to approach revision
- you'll consider one story from myriad perspectives, taking a page out of the photographer's handbook, so you can see just how many fresh perspectives there can be
- you'll translate a piece of poetry so you can experience firsthand the critical importance of paying close attention to words, and thanks to popular demand from earlier

participants who loved the translation exercise (even though, or maybe because, it's the most challenging lesson in the course) I've added a bonus translation exercise as a follow up so that you can translate your own work, which is even better for getting you to think hard about the importance of choosing the right words

- you'll get to play around with seven unique methods that will enable you to read your work as if it were someone else's, or to read it like a reader, or editor, instead of like a writer, which is crucial for ensuring your writing is as good as it can be
- you'll get to do some nitty-gritty hands-on editing of your own piece, using these essential revision tools: Don't Kill Your Darlings; Learn Your Word Tics; Start at the End; and Just Don't Simultaneously Show and Tell;
- and, because this is probably THE most common but also least understood problem of writing from a particular point of view, I decided to add another bonus self-editing tool, taken right from another one of my online courses, called Avoid Filtering; if you can master this one, and I'll make sure you do, you'll spiff up your prose like nobody's business.
- All of that in the online companion course to this video series, Revise with Confidence: See Your Writing Like an Editor.

I'm going to open enrollment very, very soon, so keep an eye out for an announcement from me in the next day or two. In the meantime, remember the steps, and think about how you can take them to the next level and apply them directly to your writing:

Gain Fresh Perspective + Distance Yourself + Use Simple Tools = You as A More Confident Writer

Until next time, what I want you to do right now, is

- Download the resources sheet, which you can find below – it contains a list of live links to all of the resources I've mentioned during this video series
- Then in a day or two, keep your eyes peeled for an email from me with full details on the Revise with Confidence premium online companion course, including a behind the scenes look at the course itself
- Take a minute to reflect on all you've thought about during this video series, and in the comments section below, if you wish, share one thing that really struck you, that was most helpful for you or that inspired you in some way. I'll read every single comment, and look forward to hearing your thoughts.

I will be in touch very soon with full details on the Revise with Confidence companion course. In the meantime, take care, do some writing. See you soon.