

THE COMPLETE  
REVISION  
WORKBOOK FOR

*Writers*

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WRITER'S ATELIER BOOKS  
WINTER PARK, FLORIDA



THE COMPLETE  
**REVISION**  
WORKBOOK FOR

*Writers*

TOOLS FOR A POLISHED NOVEL.

ARIELLE HAUGHEE

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# 1. Introduction

## DEEP BREATHS, YOU GOT THIS

It's done. That draft that pulled out every ounce of willpower, drained every bit of sanity, is finally done.

Now what?

You know you need to clean it up. Maybe you've even peeked at it again, then slammed the laptop closed when you discovered the amount of work it needs and cried into the pillow your grandmother made. Just me?

Revision can be daunting, sometimes paralyzing if you have a messy draft.

Relax. Take a deep breath.

It's overwhelming to think about every single thing that needs to be done to clean up an entire book. The goal of this workbook is to make revision more manageable for you, no matter your experience or how many issues your draft has. Included here are tools to help you examine your work, figure out trouble spots, and fix any problems, renovating your story until it's HGTV worthy.

Every writer revises differently and each book will be a different process as well. Some manuscripts need more overhaul than others and like potty training, what worked for one may not work for the next. (Cue mom crying on the floor and eating all the M&Ms.) There are a lot of resources available here, but only use the tools that fit your project.

**This is not a do-every-page-from-start-to-finish type of workbook. Use only what you need.**

So crack those knuckles and let's get down to work!

## Why Can Revision Take Forever?

Drafting is often the fun part of writing. You get to let go and write whatever you want, your muse twirling around in little ballerina circles inside your head. An event doesn't make sense in the plot? It's okay, I'll fix it *later!* Character doesn't have a clear motivation? No worries, I'll clean that up *later*, too! Let me just get all these

amazing ideas down on the page and I will make everything perfect *later*.

Well, now it's *later*.

Revision is the real work in writing, unless you are one of those purple unicorns who writes a perfect first draft. Most of us have to roll up our sleeves and put in a lot of effort to get a story where it needs to be. I spend about 30% of my time drafting novels and 70% revising. Of course, this varies with each project. Several factors contribute to why revision often takes much longer than drafting.

There are two parts to revision: identifying problems and fixing them. The best tactic for noticing what needs to be fixed in your novel is getting perspective. You do that by stepping away for a little bit and letting time help you look at the story differently. Work on something else, whether it be a different part of this particular story or a short story/poem/flash fiction piece. You can then go back with fresh eyes and you'll be surprised at what you notice. Time is your friend.

Fixing the issues in your work is usually harder than figuring out what is wrong. You may notice your character is flat. What *exactly* do you do chapter after chapter to make them more round? After you've tried to fix something, how do you know it's really fixed? There is no easy answer for that, except to follow your **narrative instincts**. Writers often develop feelings about their story. If you hate, even despise, one part in particular in your work, it's your brain trying to tell you there's a problem. You just haven't figured it out yet. Follow your gut. If you sense something isn't right, then it probably isn't. And if you tried to fix a problem and still aren't sure, critique partners are the best tool for this. We'll discuss that more later. Figuring out how to fix a problem and determining if it is truly fixed also contributes to the time factor.

In addition, it's harder to measure progress in revision. With drafting, you can track your word count or see how far along you are in your storyline. Revision is a bit more nebulous and sometimes it can feel like you are working in circles, because sometimes you do. Therefore, it's harder to see the finish line.

All this time and hard work combined with not knowing if you are making any progress can lead to a very real problem: **revision burnout**. There is so much work to do, you just stop. You abandon your story, maybe even tell yourself you'll come back to it later. Giving up on your story is the biggest crime in writing. You spent all this time and energy on your project. Don't throw it all away. Yes, it's hard to fix a story. So, so hard. Don't quit because it's not easy. Many things can happen that will halt your revision process, some of them you won't be able to control, but others you can.

As you go through the revision process several times, you'll become aware of how you work as a writer, where you tend to linger, some of your bad habits, and good ones, too! You'll be able to revise faster with more practice. Keeping your motivation and having the right mindset makes a huge difference in your progress.

## 2. Mindset & Motivation

### SEVEN REVISION DELAYS

**Y**ou've finished drafting your great cat space opera, *Cosmic Catastrophe*, about Henrickson the wise-cracking Burmese who unwittingly finds himself in a galactic conspiracy to overthrow the evil Siamese rulers. He teams up with the beautiful, no-nonsense Persian, Libby, and together they search for the long-lost enchanted stones that will rid the galaxy of its suppressors once and for all. What they didn't expect to find was each other. Me-ow!

Phase one of your masterpiece is complete. Now time for phase two, revision. Let's look into some things that may halt the next part of your journey.

#### *Delay #1: Planning Circles*

Henrickson's backstory isn't quite complete and you need to figure it out to help explain his decision making. You decide he was abandoned in an alley as a kitten and that Osso, the lead evil Siamese, found him and injected him with a magical serum when he was little. Now you need to figure out all the kinds of magical serums they use in this world. And was Libby exposed to one at some point? What if all the characters were injected with serums? Now this will change the climax, so you need to redo that entire section. Now you decide to make another character, the wizard who created all the serums, and add in another POV...

You keep planning and planning, saying what you are going to do with your story without ever working on it. These are **planning circles**. One proposed change leads to another and another and yet another. It's an endless loop of changes. You spend so much time planning you either never get to the revision, or you never feel "ready" enough because there are more changes to make in your eyes.

Know when to stop making your revision plan and start doing the work of revising. Has it been weeks or months of planning? There will be things you decide to change as you go anyway, so get started.

## Delay #2: Insecurity

You look over *Cosmic Catastrophe* and realize just how much work it needs. Libby is bossy and annoying whenever she talks. You have open plotlines with all her littermates you don't know how to close up. The pacing during the space battle is all off and the steamy scene afterward isn't so steamy. There are many more issues than you thought with this manuscript. You don't think you're skilled enough as a writer to fix the mess you've made.

The challenges of revision can pick away at your self-confidence and make you feel like you really can't do it, especially if you have a messy draft. Some of the story issues you'll have will take many rounds before you figure out how to fix them. It's frustrating and can make you feel like you're an idiot for not figuring it out. Or that you can't solve it at all and you have no idea what you're doing as a writer.

Start with one story issue. Take out a notebook and brainstorm all the possible fixes, even some unconventional ones. Something about handwriting your thoughts and ideas activates your brain and will remind you that you can do this. You had all the brilliance to come up with the story in the first place and that brilliance is still there for when it comes time to fix your story issues. Just look at one issue at a time, even if that means one scene. A little progress is still progress. Get your feet wet and you will get in a rhythm. And if you get overwhelmed and the insecurity stops your momentum, pull out that notebook again.

## Delay #3: Fear

So what happens if you do spend all that time fixing everything with your cat space opera and it still isn't *good*? You may think you'll spend months, even years on a project that will be a total waste of time.

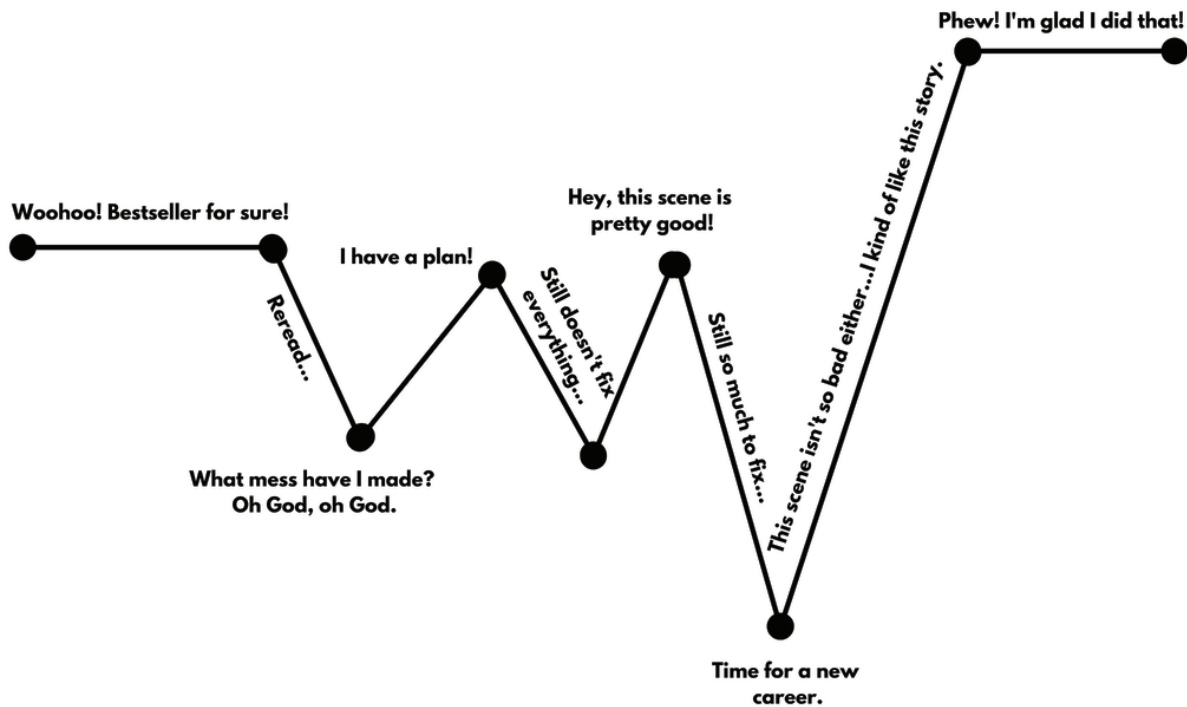
Writers at every level are thinking, "Is this good?" with each scene, each chapter, each book they work on. Fear can be helpful as long as it keeps you working on your story. When fear stops you from making any progress at all, then it's a real problem. Your story definitely won't be "good" if you stop or don't even start at all. Believe in your story and your abilities as a writer.

## Delay #4: Hating Your Story

Libby and Henrickson are obnoxious pains in the butt. Osso is lame and you don't even like outer space anymore. That whole song and dance routine wouldn't work in a vacuum, you dummy!

You don't like Brussel sprouts, you despise pickled beets, but there is nothing you hate more than your story right now. It's stupid. Really, really stupid. At least that's what you think.

There is an emotional journey with stories that many writers feel. Here is a quick visual of the Writer's Emotional Roller Coaster of Revision.



Hating your story is normal. I do many times throughout the process. Like with fear, use the negative emotion to fuel you to keep going. Don't stop entirely, you may just be in a downswing on the revision roller coaster.

## *Delay #5: Squirrel! A.K.A. Distractions*

Your phone isn't the biggest distraction from your revision. While social media, email, and other digital nonsense can definitely suck up valuable time, the brightest, shiniest, most attention-getting thing for writers is a new idea.

Lightning strikes the brain and zaps an electrifying new story into your head. Now it itches. You NEED to work on this one.

Idea notebooks can help with lightning strikes. Jot down your story idea and all the exciting details,

capturing the energy for when you can get to it. The great thing about idea notebooks is you can keep putting more and more ideas in there as they come, getting the energy out of your system until you can focus on it later.

But what if it's an amazing idea, just one, and you HAVE to do it now? Taking on another project while you are revising is possible, but you need to be careful it doesn't totally subsume your revision time. Consciously divide your time each week between revising and your new project, but be aware this will slow down the pace of your revision due to the simple fact that you will be spending less time on your first project.

What if you are already on a new project while revising and another idea comes to you? The more you divide your attention, the slower your progress will be on all your projects. This may lead to feeling like you work all the time but don't make much progress on anything.

Be very conscious of what projects get your active work time. Your goal is to finish one thing, not start many things.

## Delay #6: Illusion

You've decided once and for all. *Cosmic Catastrophe* is way too much work. It would be much easier to start over with a new idea. You wouldn't have all the problems you have now because this next story would be better.

Riiiiiiight.

You seem to have forgotten all that time you spent planning and all the twists and turns of drafting. And guess what, you'd still have to revise the next one! Yes, some stories are better than others. But you won't know until you finish. And every story you finish is an important step in your journey as an author.

## Delay #7: Refreshing Time

The manuscript sat for a while and you are ready to dive back in. Hmmm, when did Henrickson steal the spacepod? Was that Tuesday? And what was that serum you planned for Osso? It's been too long since you've worked on it and you can't remember. Now you need to spend some time refreshing yourself on your story and your plan, delaying your final product further.

Every time you set your novel down and walk away from it for a while, you will have to spend valuable time remembering everything you wrote about. And the bigger the book, the longer it will take. Keep working on your manuscript every week, even if it is something small, to keep the story alive and active in your mind.

## Keeping Your Motivation

### *Goal Setting, Routines, and Accountability*

Set a realistic goal date for finishing your revision. Make a schedule for yourself that is aggressive but realistic. Time is your friend during revision because it gives you perspective. But it can become your enemy if you allow too much of it to pass. Be deliberate with your time and manage it well. Don't lose connection with your story. The more time passes between work sessions, the longer it will take for you to jump back into your story. Have an accountability system set in place. *See the Revision Goal Work Page and the Revision Timeline Work Page.*

### *Focus on Progress, not Perfection*

Take the time to look at what you have done as you are revising, not on what still needs to be fixed or finished. Your goal is to make progress, not to make everything absolutely perfect. That's not even possible. When you have a challenging week or month or year, work a little bit on revising each week. Even if you only fit an hour in here and there, a little progress is still progress and it's more than what you had yesterday. Then when you have a chance, look back at everything you have done and be proud of your efforts.

### *Keep in Touch with Your Love of the Story*

There will be many times when you want to quit and think this is all a waste of time. Remember why you started your story in the first place. What was that spark? That excitement? Write down a list of scenes or quotes from your book that you love. Keep your notebook out—the one where you frantically wrote down this lightning bolt of a story. Focus on the positive aspects and remind yourself that is what you are fighting for.

### *Build a Support Network*

Connect with other writers and authors. In person is best but online works, too. We all know what it is like to be stuck in the mire of revision. Lean on your friends for support and talk through problems with them.

# Revision

START DATE:

FINISH GOAL DATE:



# *Revision Timeline*

MONTH:

GOAL:

# *Revision Timeline*

MONTH:

GOAL:

# 3. The Complete Revision Workbook Overview

## THE THREE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE REVISION PROCESS

**T**hree activities happen during revision: evaluating, problem-solving, and planning. When you are just beginning revision, you'll have to do these three in order before you dive in. As the process is underway, you'll find new issues, come up with different fixes, and adapt your plan along the way. This workbook is set up to give resources for each of these processes in revision.

It took over a year to draft, but your mystery, *The Great Canine Caper*, is ready for revision.

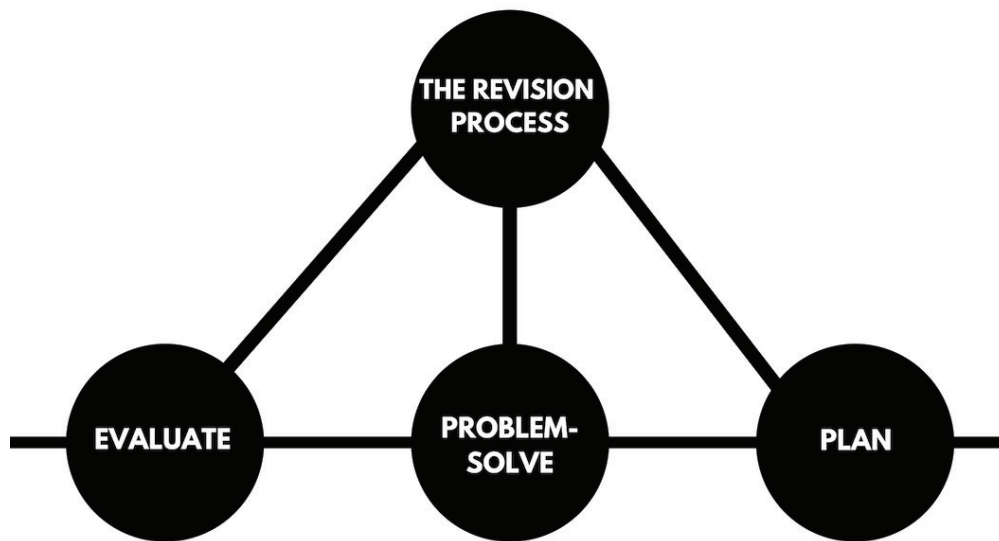
To start, you need to **evaluate** your manuscript to determine where you have problems in your story. The best ways are to give yourself some distance to get perspective before you start and also to receive feedback from others. *The Evaluation Work Pages* and section eight, *Getting and Managing Feedback*, can assist with this process. You've gone through *The Great Canine Caper* and realized you didn't introduce the bad guy, well, bad girl, Roxy McFluffers, until the big climax at the doggie day spa. Oops.

Once you identify the issues you need to fix, it's time to **problem solve**. You can use the *Common Problems and Solution Ideas* in this workbook or refer to the *Resource Recommendation* section for more in-depth assistance. You realize you need to add a subplot where you bring Roxy in several times in the story, sabotaging all the dog shows you mentioned but never showed up in any scenes in the first draft.

After you've figured out how you are going to fix your issues, it's time to make a **plan** for execution. You'll need to figure out exactly what to do, chapter by chapter, to implement your solution ideas into your novel. You decide you'll introduce Roxy in chapter three where she'll set the fire sprinklers off and ruin the

heroine’s perfectly coiffed ‘do before the show. Then in chapter six, she’ll hit on the heroine’s love interest, Spuds MacTENZIE. And so on.

A word of caution—don’t spend too much time planning before you get started or pausing to remake your plan. You may get caught in **planning circles** that distract you from making progress in your manuscript. There are issues you’ll figure out how to address along the way. Once you get started, make sure you’re always working on some part of the manuscript each week, even if it is tweaking a smaller part while you figure out an issue elsewhere.



### Revision Rounds as an Inverse Pyramid

We are house flippers, you and I. We have our own reality show called “Flipping Out,” and we buy homes, fix them up, and sell them for ridiculous prices. I’m Alpha, the no-nonsense, get-this-done, gray coveralls person and you’re Zedd, the one in the purple flannel shirt with all the zany, fun, creative ideas that make everything awesome. We’re a good pair—it takes creativity and organization to get the job done. Just like writing.

On “Flipping Out,” we take care of things in a specific order, tackling the big projects first and working our way down to the smaller ones. We replumb the house before putting in a new bathroom faucet. We replace the windows before hanging the curtains. We pull that hot tub out of the master bedroom before recarpeting. Why was that in there? Ew.