
Writing Spaces Vol. 4 Peer Review Complete - Revise & Resubmit

6 messages

Writing Spaces <writingspacestextbooks@gmail.com>

Tue, Nov 17, 2020 at 2:27 PM

To: "Benjamin M. Miller" <millerb@pitt.edu>

Dear Ben,

Thank you for submitting your work for consideration for Writing Spaces Volume 4. We have received two blind reviews from peer reviewers (included below). One reviewer recommended a "Revise & Resubmit" and the other "Reject." I am recommending this chapter for a "Revise & Resubmit" but it will need substantial revision in the areas of focus, organization, and accessibility to be successful. Please note that editors may still reject your chapter if revisions aren't successful. One of the reviewer's has also provided marginal comments, and I will pass those along to you as well.

The following are the revisions that have been highlighted by reviewers that our editorial team would like to see you address:

- **Focus & Organization:** We agree with Reviewer 1 & 2's observations that both the focus and organization needs substantial work for this essay to be useful for first year writers. As Reviewer 2 has recommended, this chapter should "present a more straightforward and detailed description of how 1) how attending to version control/diff can sponsor metacognition and reflection, 2) "how to create diffs and use them to understand one's most commonly used strategies and plan additional strategies." The chapter should be reorganized and developed differently. Reviewer 1 recommends a specific organization as well as beginning with your final statement to create a more focused organization throughout: "The final paragraph ("to sum up") [could serve] more effectively as an opening paragraph. Try this as an intro, then discuss only the sections that explicate those ideas. That may means whole sections are removed, with newly some added sections replacing them. Similarly, Reviewer 2 recommends to that you "Consider starting immediately by discussing the importance of reflection and metacognition for improving one's writing and particularly one's revision." My own editorial insight is that you spend less time focusing on the many different programs that allow diff control and more time focused on specific strategies for using diff control to allow for revision, reflection, and metacognition. I do not see the GitHub as a useful tool to explain because its unlikely that students will take up this program. Rather, I would recommend focusing more on MS Word and Google Docs.
- **Audience, Accessibility, and Tone:** Both reviewers have found issues in terms of audience, accessibility and tone, and I encourage the author to consider closely all of their critiques and suggestions. Significantly, the focus and organization of the piece (discussed above) also needs to be improved to increase accessibility. Reviewer 1 notes that "much of the language and discussion seems more focused toward faculty and academics...[and many] of the ideas could be better translated for a student audience." The brief discussion of the author's dissertation is a good example of this - and could be easily reframed to position the author as a graduate student working on a culminating academic project. Please read through your draft AFTER re-organization to ensure that examples such as the one related to the dissertation are re-framed for a first year

student audience. Reviewer 2 also recommends that the overall chapter organization and focus should be simplified and made “more concrete” for undergraduate students. On a more local level, the author should be more careful about the use of jargon: “Terms like stuckpoints and markdown files are not currently defined and seem to presume an audience with technical knowledge that most first year students are not likely to have.”

We also suggest you pay careful attention to both reviews (attached here) so that you can attend specifically to the feedback offered.

Your revision will be due by **January 8, 2021**. When you submit your revision, please include a cover letter that outlines the feedback you received and the revisions you made.

Please let us know if you have any questions!

Sincerely,

Megan, Matt, Mary, and Dana
Writing Spaces Editors

Is this text accessible to first-year student audiences?

- Reviewer 1 (Aaron): strongly disagree
- Reviewer 2 (Angela): strongly disagree

Would you use this text in your own courses?

- Reviewer 1: no
- Reviewer 2: maybe

Comments to Authors:

Reviewer 1:

Your premise is intriguing (using current word processing technologies to aid reflection and be more intentional about revision), but there are some concerns about how much undergrad students could take away from the article in its current form. I describe some of those thoughts below. A first thought is that some of the discussion seems to be a bit behind the times for student needs. In the age of Google Docs, and with Google Classroom used widely in K-12 schools, it is unlikely that most students need such a lengthy introduction to version history and autosaving document technologies. This leads into a second concern, which is that the article seems unsure of its audience. While intended for a publication that serves undergraduate students, much of the language and discussion seems more focused toward faculty and academics. Many of the ideas could be better translated for a student audience. Some of the discussions are better saved for a different audience altogether. The examples are often not well suited for a general undergrad audience, especially if they are first-year students. Most discussions and examples tend to be author-centered rather than student centered (e.g. “I think my 10-page dissertation proposal got up to something like “draft 23” before I finally submitted it” and “Having the diffs right there helps me write the commit message in light of the specific changes, and if I forget to commit at the end of a working session, it reminds me of what I was in the middle of”). With revision, this approach could be

framed to come across as "I am a student like you; here is what I have experienced and how it could help you." But currently it is not framed that way. Rather than translating the field's ideas for a diverse first-year undergrad audience, the diction level in the article often seems meant for fellow academics in the field. Regarding organization, there are several major ideas in the draft and yet they are not organized very explicitly. There are two subtitles in the article, but they do not fully capture all of the ideas discussed within those sections, so undergrad students may struggle to keep up. At the end of the first section you ask "What do you think your revision history would have to say about it?" (That is, about your revision tendencies). This feels like a culminating moment and it serves as a reveal of the big idea that the first section has been building toward, but the lead-up to the statement in the first section involves a lot of wandering and self-contained discussion that would not mean much to students and would not lead them to be ready to grapple with this question now. Some of the larger ideas as I see them are listed below. They are not always discussed in this order, but I reordered them into something that feels like a more easily understood organization for students. 1. You as a student revise as you write, even if you don't think about it 2. There are VCS tools that track your versions (quick intro to G Docs, Draftback) 3. You should use these tools to see what they see 4. Using these tools purposefully can help you take command of your writing 5. In particular, your revision and reflection work can become much more intentional However, ideas 4 and 5 (and to some extent, 3) do not receive any real explanation. Rather than a focus on students' revision processes and how VCS tools can aid them, the article currently devotes most of the discussion to introducing software tools, with in-depth discussions of their functions and analysis of their affordances and drawbacks. These are worthwhile discussions, however, it is difficult to see what students are supposed to take away from these ideas and use for themselves. A lengthy exposition on the goods and bads of various word processing programs is unlikely to help students analyze their revision and reflection practices. I see a need to focus more on the compelling ideas of the article (in the last half of the list above). To refocus this article on serving student needs, I could actually see the final paragraph ("to sum up") serving more effectively as an opening paragraph. Try this as an intro, then discuss only the sections that explicate those ideas. That may mean whole sections are removed, with newly some added sections replacing them.

Reviewer 2:

I enjoyed the chance to review your article. I am always on the lookout for effective revision strategies to use with my students, and this approach is one that they are not likely to have used in the past. I think that using diffs to help students recognize the revision moves they are already making and to expand their tool kit of revision strategies is a really compelling idea. I also like how this strategy is linked to reflection and can imagine using such a strategy with my first year writers. That said, the article seems to assume that if first year students learn how to create diffs, they will automatically also understand how to use these to help them understand their common revision strategies and expand their revision tool kit. I don't think this is a safe assumption to make. In fact, creating the diffs is probably the easiest part of this process for students. Understanding how to read the diffs so as to better understand their own most common revision moves seems like it would be far more challenging for first year students, and then using that information to choose new revision strategies seems even more difficult. My impression is that to be as useful as possible to a range of first year students, the chapter needs to present a more straightforward and detailed description of how to create diffs and use them to understand one's most commonly used strategies and plan additional strategies. I felt that by the end of the chapter the focus had become almost entirely on describing multiple ways to create diffs using different programs rather than on how to use the diffs to understand and develop revision strategies. My major recommendation is to reorganize and develop the chapter differently. Consider starting immediately by discussing the

importance of reflection and metacognition for improving one's writing and particularly one's revision. I don't think the chapter ever fully describes why the effort required to generate these diffs is worth it or necessary for students—in a way that they will understand and buy into. Then I recommend describing the multiple levels of revision—using examples, perhaps from your own chapter drafts—to show what surface revision look like in contrast to significant revisions. Then I think the chapter should show students the way you recommend creating diffs. I would not spend too much time discussing specific programs here since that will quickly date this chapter as technologies change. Instead, I think the emphasis should be on what students do with the diffs after they have created them using your preferred method (which should be chosen based on being most accessible to first year students, some of whom have limited access to technology and other resources). How can they use these to see the strategies they are using most commonly? In other words, show your readers how to read the diffs. Then discuss how they can use the diffs to expand the strategies they are using. Overall, I think the chapter needs to be more concrete and simplified for student readers. I also think you need to be careful about using jargon in your essay. Terms like stuckpoints and markdown files are not currently defined and seem to presume an audience with technical knowledge that most first year students are not likely to have. I have provided some marginal comments on the chapter as well that I forwarded to the editors. I hope you will find this feedback helpful.

Recommendation

- Reviewer 1: reject
- Reviewer 2: revise & resubmit

Info for editors

Reviewer 1:

There is an idea buried in there (i.e. "looking through your previous draft versions while you write can be make your revision and reflection work more purposeful"). But that discussion, which is promised in the title, never fully materialized in the draft. Most of the article focuses elsewhere. There is an abundance of detail describing how various software programs work, along with the author's personal takes on the affordances and drawbacks of those programs. That level of technical detail and focus on specific tools is not necessary in an article about student revision and reflection. It is also likely to age poorly and become archaic as programs update. The discussion is author-focused and the author talks to themselves often in asides and digressions. For these and other reasons the article is not likely to be engaging for a student audience. The article is tied to conversations in the composition literature. However, for an article premised on the importance of analyzing version history in modern documents, only one cited source (Chamberlain) is actually theorizing writing from that framework. Other sources are less current and/or are connected to larger composition principles rather than this specific idea.

Reviewer 2:

I will send comments on the manuscript itself via email. This chapter has potential but it is not currently accessible to its audience. I also found that the supplementary material provided following the chapter was disconnected from the content of the chapter itself (in other words, the chapter doesn't prepare students to complete the activities outlined in the supplementary materials).

The *Writing Spaces* Editorial Team
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Benjamin M. Miller <millerb@pitt.edu>
To: Writing Spaces <writingspacestextbooks@gmail.com>

Tue, Nov 17, 2020 at 4:34 PM

Dear Megan, Matt, Mary, and Dana,

Thanks for giving me the second shot, and the feedback – these comments and concrete suggestions will be very helpful in guiding my revision! I'll be back in touch closer to January 8th with my updated submission.

All best,
Ben

[Quoted text hidden]

Benjamin M. Miller <millerb@pitt.edu>
To: Writing Spaces <writingspacestextbooks@gmail.com>

Mon, Dec 14, 2020 at 10:47 AM

Dear Megan, Matt, Mary, and Dana,

As I'm weighing all that's on my plate this winter, I'm writing to ask whether it would be possible to delay my revise-and-resubmit of "What's the Diff? Version Control and Revision Reflection" until Writing Spaces Volume 5. The suggestions from both reviewers continue to be very helpful, especially in terms of restructuring the article to bring it back in line with my initial intentions: i.e. to showcase some different forms that revision moves can take, and why version control helps writers see those moves and learn to draw on them. To do the revisions justice, though, I think would take more time than I currently have – and the subject matter should continue to be relevant even a year from now. I'm prepared to undergo a fresh round of peer review next fall, if that's what a delay would require.

Grateful for your consideration,
Ben

[Quoted text hidden]

Writing Spaces <writingspacestextbooks@gmail.com>
To: "Benjamin M. Miller" <millerb@pitt.edu>

Tue, Jan 5, 2021 at 6:30 PM

Hi Ben,

I'm so sorry that we are just responding to this email! It's definitely possible to delay your R&R until Vol 5. We'll send you a reminder when we're getting to that phase, but it should be a similar timeline to this, only a year later.

Again, I apologize for the delay in this response.

Mary
[Quoted text hidden]

Writing Spaces <writingspacestextbooks@gmail.com>

Thu, Apr 29, 2021 at 11:50 AM

To: "Benjamin M. Miller" <millerb@pitt.edu>

Hello Ben.

I am following up with you with a reminder about the upcoming submission deadline for Volume 5 of Writing Spaces which is **August 28, 2021**.

I was inquiring with you today to see if you were still planning on submitting your revised and resubmitted article for Volume 5? We are very excited to receive it and work with you further. Can you please respond to this email and let me know if you still plan on submitting?

All of the submission guidelines can be found in the email we sent last year--please let me know if you want me to resend them.

Thank you!

Dana

[Quoted text hidden]

Benjamin M. Miller <millerb@pitt.edu>

Thu, Apr 29, 2021 at 1:01 PM

To: Writing Spaces <writingspacestextbooks@gmail.com>

Dear Dana,

Thanks for the follow-up! Yes, I'm still planning to resubmit for August!

All best,

Ben

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