



## Revising Approaches – Part 2

What if your Crappy First Draft is, well, REALLY Crappy? What if it seems hopeless, beyond any revision's help?

My first university English professor told me I could improve my paper by a letter grade every time I **rewrite** it. His advice: Don't **edit** your draft, Laura. Set the draft next to you, and **TRY** to **copy** it. You won't be able to write the same bad sentence twice. You'll find yourself improving it—a **lot**.

I found that to be true, over and over. I have used the approach long after I stopped receiving grades on my writing.

Now suppose you have a draft worth revising. An effective narrative acknowledges and addresses criticisms while emphasizing your strengths.

Let's talk about ways to **emphasize** your strengths. One approach depends on **placement within a paragraph**.

The **first** sentence in a paragraph will always receive the most attention. A paragraph's **last** sentence receives the next most visibility. In part, that's because of the white space around those words; they pop out on the page or on the screen. So make sure your first and last sentences speak to your strengths.

To de-emphasize something that you nevertheless wish to acknowledge, place it in the middle of the paragraph.

A second approach to emphasis relies on **placement within a sentence**. The main clause in a sentence must always be about your strength.

Many students experience growth in critical thinking and high levels of learning in my courses.

Do **not** equally weight praise and criticism by creating a compound sentence with a **but**.

Many students experience growth in critical thinking and high levels of learning in my courses, *but some do not enjoy the high expectations I express.*

Instead, **subordinate** the negative to the positive by placing the negative in a subordinate clause.

Many students experience growth in critical thinking and high levels of learning in my courses, *although not all enjoy the growth.*

A subordinate clause can be your good friend.

While some chafe against the high expectations I hold, I believe students' learning is too important to sidestep identifying specific ways they can improve, even if they do not like discovering they are not as good as they imagined.

If you want to ground these mid-level inferences in data, you can insert it.

While some chafe against the high expectations I hold—for example, a student in Introduction to Business wrote, “Why dose [sic] she grade this class so differently than the other sections are graded? She is a tough grader...”—I believe students' learning is too important to sidestep identifying specific ways they can improve, even if they do not like discovering they are not as good as they imagined. Another student from the same freshman course wrote, “She cares for her students and their future success.”

Remember, place the *negative* in the *subordinate* clause. By its nature, a subordinate clause **cannot stand alone**. To **complete** the thought, the reader **must move to the main clause**, where the positive stands.

Not:

While some students articulate appreciation for engaging and encouraging them, **others have indicated they perceive my teaching as demanding and disorganized.**

Instead:

While my approach is not universally valued, as some students perceive my teaching as demanding and disorganized, **many students articulate appreciation for engaging and encouraging them.**

Johnny Mercer's song says to “Eliminate the negative, Latch on to the affirmative.” In professional narratives, **eliminating** the negative can make us appear oblivious to feedback, or clueless. We cannot afford that.

But we can, as the song says, Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate the Positive, with shrewd placement and a well-turned subordinate clause.