

The Revision Mindset

By Jennie Nash

Successful book revision starts with your state of mind. Here are eight core principals to get you in the right mindset for revision.

1. Be Patient

So many writers rush through the revision process. It's tempting to think you are close to the finish line simply because you have finished a rough draft, but there is likely still a lot of work to do—and it's such important work. The revision process is where your story leaps to life, where it goes from good to great. Don't cheat yourself by trying to speed through the process or hurry it along. Try to enjoy it and be patient.

2. Consider the Whole

The point of doing a revision on a full manuscript is that you have the chance to step back and consider the whole thing as a complete entity. When you read the whole thing through, you can see the sweep of the story, where it has weaknesses, where it repeats itself, and where it goes on too long. Considering the whole also allows you to look at chapter transitions—the critical beginnings and endings that do so much to lock in narrative drive. If you only focus on the line-by-line level, you are missing the point.

3. Be Strategic

Think before you write. Abe Lincoln said,

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree, and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”

This maxim holds for revision, too. Spend the bulk of your time assessing and analysing your work, identify problems, prioritizing problems, and determining *how* to fix the biggest problems first.

4. Be Honest

Shake off any ego-like attachment to the work. Yes, you created this thing. You made it from scratch and you love it and you have every right to be proud and to dream of glory. But you revise in order to improve the book and the only way you can improve is if you are honest about what is working and what isn't.

5. Be Brave

Being honest sometimes means that you don't just make the small and easy changes. You don't just rearrange deck chairs. You might rebuild the whole deck. You might build a totally different boat.

6. Remember the Reader

Remember that you are writing this book for a reader. That reader will want something from your pages—entertainment or education, solace or escape, a particular kind of feeling or experience. Think of them. Make room for them. Seek to give them what they need.

7. Trust the Creative Process

The creative process is rarely linear or predictable, and that can sometimes make it seem overwhelming and out of control. The antidote to any doubt you might feel is trust. Trust your vision for the work. Trust that you either have what it takes to bring it to life or that you can learn it. Trust that the process is unfolding in the exact way it needs to unfold.

8. Ask for Help

The idea that “real” writers do everything themselves is a fallacy. If you need proof, look at the acknowledgements of the last book you loved. The author had people who read their work at the early, fragile stages; gave them a place to stay when they needed to focus; buoyed them up when they lost their way; helped them make key decisions and sort out sticky problems; edited their words; polished their words; read their words again and again and again as they worked through their revisions. Writing is solitary work, but it does not have to be lonely.