

Lesson 4.3

The One-Two Revision Punch

Maybe you've heard of a one-two punch. It's a quick succession of punches boxers sometimes use to take down an opponent. Revisers have a one-two punch of their own. It calls for de-cluttering with the first punch and then adding important detail with the second. Sometimes revising in stages not only makes the process easier to manage, but it gives the writer valuable time to reflect on how best to make a piece of writing stronger.

The First Punch: De-clutter!

Details are important to good writing, but clutter—unnecessary words—can bury a message alive. Clutter usually takes one of two forms: repetition of an expression or idea, or empty words that simply don't say anything important. Read the example titled "Good Shot!" carefully, looking and listening for clutter.

Good Shot!

My mother is a doctor of pediatrics. This means that she is a pediatrician, a doctor who works with children. As a pediatrician who sees a lot of children, she often has funny things happen to her in her office. At least a couple times a week, she comes home with hilarious stories of her patients doing funny things. Just the other day, my mom told me a story after coming home from a day of working with children. This one patient, a child around



the age of five, had to get a shot. A lot of children are not crazy about shots, and as it happened, this particular child didn't like shots at all. In fact, he had what you could call a bad case of "shot phobia," or a real fear of getting a shot of any kind. When this child, a boy I'll call Theo, heard the word *shot* come out of his doctor's (*my mother's*) mouth, he began to scream. His scream was not an ordinary "you-scared-me" scream. No, Theo's scream was a wild, crazy, jungle-animal, "there's-a-python-after-me" loud, long, blood-curdling scream that caused *my mom's* nurse, who works in the same office, to drop the hypodermic needle she was holding. The hypodermic needle did not drop down to the hard, tiled floor where it would have shattered into hundreds of pieces. No, this hypodermic needle bounced off the cushioned examination table, where the patients sit, turned over in the air one time, and landed in a very soft place. The soft place where it landed was Theo's behind. Theo, who had been screaming, stopped screaming and stared at the nurse. The nurse, who had been trying to give him a shot, just reached down and finished off the shot. It's hard to believe, but, unbelievably, Theo began to laugh. When *my mom* told me this story, I had to laugh, too.



My Response

Which of the following best describes your response to “Good Shot!”?

- It’s a good balance of detail and concise writing.
- It’s a little cluttery, but if I hadn’t been looking carefully for clutter, I wouldn’t have noticed.
- It’s ridiculously wordy! It could be cut in half!

Partner Up to Pare Down

Work with a partner to revise “Good Shot!” First discuss the piece. Does it need a little trim or a major overhaul? Then work together to de-clutter, reading the piece aloud sentence by sentence and deciding what to cut. **HINT:** After slicing away, you may need to reword some sentences to smooth the flow.

Share and Compare

Compare our revision with yours. Did you use the same strategy? As you can see, we did not add any details. We just cut clutter, trimming the original 315-word draft down to a skinny but powerful 132 words (title not included).

Good Shot!

My mother is a pediatrician, a doctor who works with children, and she often has funny stories about her work. The other day, a five-year-old patient named Theo had to get a shot. Theo has “shot phobia,” and as soon as he heard the *word shot*, he let out a crazy “there’s-a-python-after-me” blood-curdling scream that caused the nurse to drop the hypodermic needle. It didn’t land on the tiled floor, where it would have shattered. It bounced off the cushioned examination table, turned over in the air one time, and landed in a very soft place—Theo’s behind. Theo instantly stopped screaming and stared at the nurse, who reached down and finished off the shot. Then, unbelievably, Theo began to laugh. When my mom told me this story, I had to laugh, too.

Put a check (✓) next to the sentence that best describes your comparison of our version to yours:

- We cut *even more* clutter—our story is short but complete.
- We cut almost as much clutter—and our story is similar.
- We couldn't bear to cut anything. It was all just *so good!*
- We actually *added* words, creating a longer, stronger story.

The One-Two Punch: De-clutter, Re-build

Following is another piece that needs your help. This time, you'll revise in steps, working on your own first. Follow this plan:

- Read the passage called “Shedding Pounds” to get the main idea.
- Read it again, pencil in hand, deleting clutter.
- Read it a third time, inserting two or three vivid details that add meaning and voice.

HINT: It is fine to reword anything. We double spaced to give you revision room. You do NOT need to recopy anything.

Shedding Pounds

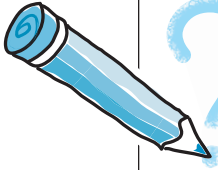
Both *my* parents, *my* mom and *my* dad, are on this diet, or as *my* dad would say, “shedding some unneeded pounds.” I think it's good they're trying to do this because it's good for them in the long run to be in better shape and more fit. I am also really happy that this diet does not require them to eat a bunch of wacky, strange food that I wouldn't want to eat. As a matter of fact, they are now eating a lot more foods that are good for them.

This means eating less junk food and more fruits and vegetables. This is OK with me because I've always been a fruit and vegetable person. That may seem strange for a kid to eat a lot of fruits and vegetables, but I do. My parents are also trying to exercise more by doing things like walking, biking, yoga, and even running. Fortunately, allowing me to beat them at basketball is another form of exercise we can enjoy as a whole family, and even though they always lose, they at least get a workout! And that's a good thing!

Share and Compare

Share your revision with a partner or in a writing circle. See how many revision strategies you can list. (Add more numbers if you need to.) If any person on your team tried a given strategy, list it here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____



A Writer's Question

Suppose a writer has trouble telling the clutter from the good stuff. (Ever have this problem when cleaning out your closet?) What advice would you offer?



Putting It to the Test

In an on-demand writing situation, you often do not have time to go back and cross out words or sentences. Can you think of any strategy you could use to keep clutter from accumulating in your writing in the first place?