Writer’s Dilemma And Importance Of English

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Introduction

“Writer’s Dilemma and Importance of English” brings together three influential discussions of composing: Nancy Sommers’s study of revision, Mike Rose’s analysis of writer’s block, and Min-Zhan Lu’s argument about “living English.” The original essay correctly sees a connection among revision, restrictive rules, and language expectations, but it misidentifies some arguments and treats one standardized form of English as the inevitable solution to communication. Together, the readings show that writing improves when writers can reconsider meaning, use rules flexibly, and recognize English as a changing language shaped by many communities. The central dilemma is not simply how to avoid mistakes. It is how to produce purposeful, intelligible work without allowing rigid conventions to silence discovery or difference (Lu, 2006; Rose, 1980; Sommers, 1980).

Sommers and the Meaning of Revision

Nancy Sommers compared college freshmen with experienced adult writers to examine how they understood revision. Student writers often described revision through words such as rewording, substitution, deletion, and cleaning up. Their attention remained close to the sentence, and they tended to preserve the original idea and structure. Experienced writers described a recursive process in which a draft helps the writer discover what the subject and argument actually require. They reconsidered audience, emphasis, order, evidence, and the relationship among parts. Revision therefore was not a final repair stage after “real writing.” It was central to composing because the writer could use the developing text to identify dissonance and reshape meaning (Sommers, 1980).

Why Student Writers Revise Locally

Students often work within grading systems that reward error avoidance and completion. When assignments are treated as tests of whether the writer already knows the answer, a first draft can feel like a performance that should have been correct from the beginning. Revision then appears to admit failure. Limited time and narrow feedback also encourage local editing because replacing a word is easier than rethinking a claim. Sommers does not argue that sentence-level work is unimportant. She shows that it becomes limiting when writers cannot see alternatives at the level of purpose and structure. Teaching should therefore create multiple drafts, useful feedback, and genuine reasons to

make conceptual changes rather than merely require a clean copy (Sommers, 1980).

Revision as Discovery

Experienced writers use revision to locate the argument within material that may initially be uncertain or excessive. They read their own drafts as readers, asking where emphasis weakens, where an example changes the question, and where the conclusion no longer follows from the introduction. This process can involve addition and deletion, but the visible changes serve a larger re-seeing of the text. The writer does not simply decorate an original message. The message develops through writing. A practical method is to summarize each paragraph, identify the claim each section advances, and compare that structure with the paper's purpose. When the parts do not form a coherent relationship, revision must change organization or reasoning rather than substitute synonyms (Sommers, 1980).

Rose and Writer's Block

Mike Rose defines writer's block as difficulty beginning or continuing despite adequate commitment and basic skill. His case studies show that some students become trapped by rigid rules or inflexible plans. A rule such as "always capture the reader immediately" can make a student spend hours perfecting an opening before discovering the paper's direction. Another writer may believe that every sentence must be grammatically flawless before the next sentence can be drafted. These rules are not completely false; engaging openings and correctness can matter. The problem is their absolute use at the wrong stage. A helpful guideline becomes harmful when it cannot be suspended, adapted, or ranked against other goals (Rose, 1980).

Plans, Heuristics, and Flexibility

Writers need plans, but a plan should function as a heuristic rather than a prison. An outline can organize research and reduce cognitive load, yet drafting may reveal that the evidence supports a different sequence. Flexible writers maintain a goal while changing the route. They can use a provisional opening, leave a difficult paragraph, write the section they understand, and return after the argument becomes clearer. Rose's analysis rejects the idea that blocked writers are lazy or lack talent. The block can result from how they represent the task. Instruction should help writers diagnose the rule controlling their behavior and replace it with conditional strategies: an introduction should orient the audience, but it need not be finalized first (Rose, 1980).

Grammar as Resource rather than Barrier

The original essay says writers cannot publish unless they adhere to fixed standards. Every genre does have conventions, and readers need enough shared language to follow an argument. However,

grammar is not a single list of eternal prohibitions. It includes patterns that writers choose according to purpose, audience, medium, and rhetorical effect. Editing for clarity should occur, but demanding perfect correctness during invention can interrupt idea development. Writers can separate stages: draft for meaning, revise for structure, then edit sentences and proofread. This sequence is not rigid, because experienced writers move among levels, but it prevents fear of a comma or verb form from stopping inquiry. Correctness should support communication rather than become the only measure of intelligence.

Lu and Living English

Min-Zhan Lu's "Living-English Work" challenges the belief that one accent-free, culturally neutral English exists above all communities. English changes through migration, education, media, trade, colonization, and everyday use. Speakers bring histories and other languages into vocabulary, rhythm, grammar, and meaning. Institutions often label the English of dominant groups as normal while marking other varieties as deficient. Lu does not argue that writers should ignore audience expectations. She asks teachers and students to examine who created those expectations and what becomes possible when difference is treated as material for thinking. Living English is active negotiation, not a finished standard owned by one nation or class (Lu, 2006).

English as a Global Language

English serves international research, business, diplomacy, entertainment, and digital communication, giving many learners access to large networks of information and opportunity. Its global role also reflects histories of British colonialism and American economic power. Calling English universal can hide the unequal pressure placed on people to abandon local languages or accents. South Africa, India, Nigeria, Singapore, Pakistan, and many other societies use English alongside multiple languages in distinct ways. Effective communication does not require every speaker to imitate one prestige accent. It requires mutual intelligibility, awareness of context, and respect for linguistic diversity. Writers may learn standardized forms for particular institutions while retaining the ability to move among languages and varieties (Horner et al., 2011).

Code-Meshing and Audience

Code-meshing allows writers to combine linguistic resources within one text rather than separating them completely by setting. It can communicate identity, create precision, challenge assumptions, or reach communities ignored by formal academic language. The technique still requires rhetorical judgment. An unexplained phrase may exclude some readers, while excessive explanation can burden writers from multilingual backgrounds with constantly translating themselves. Audience analysis asks what readers need, what knowledge they bring, and what effect a language choice

creates. A writer may define a term, use context, provide a translation, or deliberately retain ambiguity. The goal is not unrestricted expression without responsibility. It is conscious language choice rather than automatic submission to one imagined standard (Canagarajah, 2013).

Technology and the Writing Process

Digital tools make revision easier by allowing writers to move paragraphs, compare versions, search sources, and receive feedback across distance. They also create new dilemmas. Grammar checkers and generative systems may standardize voice, recommend changes without understanding context, or produce fluent sentences that the writer cannot defend. Copyright protection does not mean digital texts cannot be altered, and online availability does not guarantee accuracy. Writers need source evaluation, version control, citation, and data privacy. Technology is most useful when it makes thinking visible rather than replacing it. A tracked change can show a decision, but the writer must still understand why the change improves purpose, evidence, organization, or clarity.

A Practical Integrated Method

The three readings support an integrated writing process. A writer can begin with a flexible plan, draft without demanding a perfect opening, and mark questions that need research. During global revision, the writer can test the thesis, order, evidence, counterargument, and audience. During sentence revision, the writer can improve cohesion, emphasis, and rhythm while preserving purposeful linguistic difference. Editing then addresses grammar and style required by the chosen genre, followed by proofreading for surface errors. At every stage, rules should be treated conditionally. The question is not “Did I follow every formula?” but “What does this reader need, and how does this choice serve the work?” (Lu, 2006; Rose, 1980; Sommers, 1980).

Implications for Writing Education

Writing instruction should not reduce improvement to correction marks. Students need opportunities to explain choices, receive response to ideas, and revise substantially before a final grade. Teachers can distinguish mistakes that obstruct meaning from differences that reflect language variety. They can also model how experts use outlines flexibly and revise published work. Rubrics should reward development, evidence, organization, and rhetorical awareness alongside correctness. Multilingual students should not be asked to erase identity as the price of intellectual participation. At the same time, instructors should provide direct access to conventions that institutions actually use. Respect and explicit teaching are compatible when conventions are presented as tools with histories and purposes (Horner et al., 2011; Lu, 2006).

Conclusion

Sommers, Rose, and Lu explain three related barriers to effective writing: revision reduced to word replacement, rules treated as absolute commands, and English imagined as one neutral standard. Experienced writing requires the ability to rethink meaning, change plans, and make language choices in relation to audience and purpose. Standard conventions remain useful, but they should enable rather than prevent communication. English matters because it connects writers with broad communities, yet its power should not justify linguistic hierarchy or cultural erasure. The writer's dilemma cannot be solved by one formula. It is managed through recursive revision, flexible strategy, critical language awareness, and the confidence to treat a draft as a place where thought can change (Lu, 2006; Rose, 1980; Sommers, 1980).

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