



June 2022

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### Recommended Citation

Batchelor, Katherine E. (2022) "Using the “CARD” Response Technique to Assist Middle School Students in the Revision Process," *Journal of Response to Writing*: Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/journalrw/vol8/iss1/3>

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### Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank the reviewers and the editor for their helpful suggestions on ways to revise and extend this piece. And thank you to the students who allowed me into their writing lives and spent meticulous time pondering the revision process.

# Using the “CARD” Technique to Assist Middle School Students in the Revision Process

**Katherine E. Batchelor**

*Miami University–Oxford*

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**Abstract:** Although revision is essential to the writing process, it is often neglected in schools. Research has shown that teaching revision through reflection, conferencing, positive teacher feedback, specific instruction linked to reading strategies, and built-in time between drafts for students to think about their writing can cause students not only to revise more but to revise at a deeper level by focusing on content rather than grammatical errors. This study investigates how middle school students’ writing drafts as well as attitudes and beliefs toward revision changed based on introducing a specific self-response and peer-response revision strategy called the “CARD” (change, add, rearrange, and delete) technique, named for the ways in which revision might occur in writing via holistic categories. Research questions included the following: How does middle school students’ writing change when they are taught the CARD revision technique? and, In what ways, if any, does the CARD technique enhance middle school students’ thinking about revision, specifically regarding their attitudes and perceptions of revision? This research helps educators understand students’ perceptions and beliefs toward revision, in general, and a way to encourage revision via student-led decisions in their writing.

**Keywords:** revision, self-response, peer-response, middle school students, writing, strategies, attitudes and perceptions, student-led, student-centered

### Author Note

*I would like to thank the students who allowed me into their writing lives and spent meticulous time pondering the revision process.*

Revision is the dreaded “r” word lurking in the corners of every English classroom. Wayne, a 7th grader, defined revision as “the teacher telling you what you did wrong in writing” and “writing your paper all over again.” Maddie, another 7th grader, described her experiences with revision: “When I’m in class and if I finish early in a writing assignment, my teachers usually ask me to go back and revise my paper.” Unfortunately, Wayne’s and Maddie’s vague comments regarding revision may not surprise many educators who empathize with the teaching of writing. What is disheartening and suggests the need for further examination, though, is that these students’ comments do not include specific actions regarding *how* they revised. Revision to these two students is a broad-sweeping, “one-and-done” attitude of fixing and correcting errors. Additional student comments such as “I take out the paper to be revised and revise it” or “I usually go back through all my writing and make sure it makes sense” do not get to the heart of the revision process and what it really encompasses. Perhaps students are not being specifically taught *how* to revise.

Research has shown that teaching revision through reflection, conferencing, positive teacher feedback, specific instruction linked to reading strategies, and built-in time between drafts for students to think about their writing can cause students not only to revise more but to revise at a deeper level by focusing on content rather than grammatical errors (Baer, 2008; Bardine & Fulton, 2008; Keen, 2010; Muldoon, 2009; Peterson, 2003).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how middle school students’ writing drafts and attitudes and beliefs toward revision might change based on introducing a specific revision strategy called the “CARD”

(change, add, rearrange, and delete) technique, named for the ways in which revision might occur in writing via holistic categories. The study’s research questions included the following: How does middle school students’ writing change when they are taught the CARD revision technique? and, In what ways, if any, does the CARD technique enhance middle school students’ thinking about revision, specifically regarding their attitudes and perceptions of revision?

### **Revision Practices in Writing Instruction**

Researchers have examined revision over the last 4 decades through a variety of models and methods. For example, teacher–researchers (K–16), developing their craft of teaching writing to students, have published numerous how-to books on the subject. Even though their specific strategies might vary, all share the belief that revision is an integral part to writing and teaching writing. Atwell (1998) mentioned cutting and taping, adding carets and icons, highlighting, and circling items in drafts as techniques that instructors could use as mini lessons to assist students in developing their writing. Hillocks (2007) suggested teaching students how to add, cut, and rearrange their work through questioning strategies and whole-class revision modeling. Gallagher (2011) expanded Hillocks’ techniques by developing RADAR (i.e., replace, add, delete, and reorder), noting that teaching this set of skills should be done through teacher modeling on both handwritten pieces and electronic documents with track changes. Kittle (2008) recommended peer feedback as an effective way to teach revision to students, modeling how to search for the heart in a piece of writing and labeling time in class, time away from the draft, and time to revise throughout an entire semester as crucial for developing writers to recognize the importance of revision. Noden (2011) used checklists with his students to help them identify form, content, style, and conventions, all of which he noted overlap in writing. Messner (2011) suggested using color-coded pencils to identify the five senses in students’ narrative writing

so they could note which sense was overpowering the piece or missing completely.

Other research has found significant importance in what deters and motivates students to revise. For example, Graves's (1979) longitudinal study on the revision processes of young children paved the way for recognizing writing's developmental stages and revision's role in the writing process. Revision began to be viewed as a highly complex operation requiring knowledge and a process that includes the writer's engaged role in actions and mental events, as well as in peer feedback (Flower et al., 1986).

Because of the growth in cognitive research in the 1980s, various models of revision were created. For example, Faigley and Witte (1981, 1984) created a taxonomy of revision that included microstructure and macrostructure features; six types of operations (e.g., adding, deleting); and six linguistic levels (e.g., graphic, lexical). Flower and Hayes (1981) identified three stages of revision: planning, translating, and reviewing. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1983) invented a CDO (compare, diagnose, and operate) model. Additionally, numerous studies created taxonomies for coding and categorizing revisions (Bridwell, 1980; Faigley & Witte, 1984; Sommers, 1980). These taxonomies centered on how inexperienced and experienced writers thought about revision, specifically their differences in approaches to how students revise writing, especially regarding surface-level changes (Beach, 1979; Bridwell, 1980; Faigley & Witte, 1981; Flower et al., 1986; Sommers, 1980; Yagelski, 1995). Sommers (1980) identified the frequency in which inexperienced writers made changes at the operational level (deletion, substitution, addition, and reordering) and examined the changes in terms of word, phrase, sentence, and theme level.

Faigley and Witte (1981), influenced by Sommers' (1980) research, expanded revision research to include whether students changed the meanings found in their texts when they revised; they differentiated between microstructure revision (e.g., revising a sentence) and macrostructure revision (e.g., changing the entire meaning of the work). Chanquoy (2001) continued to study revision via microstructural and macrostructural

changes by categorizing the revisions her participants made in their writing as either additions or deletions of words or parts of the text.

The notion of writers restructuring their thoughts influenced how researchers examined revision (i.e., they systematically recorded measured word units over the course of multiple drafts). However, as scholars in the last two decades have focused on revision’s external forces, their research has emphasized the teacher’s view of writing rather than the student’s view (Haar, 2006). For example, many studies conducted on revision during the 1990s and early 2000s centered on the teacher’s feedback and perceptions of writing, which gave revision a push forward, but much emphasis stayed on the teacher rather than on the child (Mlynarczyk, 1996; Patthey-Chavez et al., 2004; Sze, 2002; Yagelski, 1995). Teacher beliefs about what constitutes good writing impact how students interact with their peers’ writing as well as their own writing (Yagelski, 1995) because many of the revision strategies students learn are based on what the teacher deems “good” writing. Having a limited audience (i.e., their work’s audience is often limited to the teacher) could affect how writers revise.

Additionally, students revise if there is an environment conducive to authentic writing purposes. A classroom environment “in which the writers’ peers provide most of the input, including formative assessment, can support strategic revision” (Keen, 2010, p. 278). Moreover, students may not have enough investment in their own work to want to revise, whereas critical reflection, such as response strategies, could encourage this connection to their writing (Baer, 2008; Muldoon, 2009). Muldoon (2009) explained:

Critical revision forces students to stand up and justify their choices and explain which revision suggestions and feedback made them think more carefully about their work or why such feedback made them even more certain that their initial choices were correct. (p. 70)

More specifically, providing opportunities for students to respond to questions regarding decisions they made while writing can assist them in writing

future drafts and provide a way for students to evaluate their own writing (Bardine & Fulton, 2008).

Feedback from peers can also play an important role in revising (Keen, 2010; Peterson, 2003). One way for students to receive feedback from peers is through peer conferencing. For example, Fitzgerald and Stamm (1990) looked at student comments made in group conferences and then revisions on student papers (per 100 words) and found that conferences influenced students to revise more both at the macrolevel and microlevel, which also improved their drafts. Peterson (2003) found that peer talk in the classroom assists the revision process and that students considered peer talk “oral rehearsal” before writing (p. 267).

This study aims to showcase a particular revision-response strategy, the CARD technique, that is not based on what the teacher suggests good writing processes to be; rather, the technique stems from what students say they do while they revise and from peer feedback. This response technique will be elaborated in the coming sections.

## Methodology

### Participants

Participants in this qualitative study included 27 students enrolled in a 7th-grade advanced English course (Ms. Gardener’s 7th period class; all names are pseudonyms) at a public middle school in the Midwest over the course of one semester (September–November). All 27 students agreed to participate with IRB approval from my university. I selected this class period due to its fit with my teaching schedule at the university. Students in this class identified as White, except for one student who identified as multiracial. Students were all first-language English speakers. The class composite reflects the district’s demographics as well.

Ms. Gardener wanted assistance in teaching a writer’s workshop for her students, and her principal put us in contact since I had recently conducted professional development in their school district. Since I would



teach her last period of the day, we decided that she would take the role of “observer” during the periods I taught her class so that she could implement the same lessons and activities the following day with her other class sections.

As a former middle school teacher for 10 years and now as a teacher educator, I have struggled with how to teach revision and admit I may have done it poorly during my early teaching career. Over the years, I wanted to make amends by researching revision, practicing revision, and attending various workshops like the National Writing Project Summer Institute. Since I now teach writing to preservice teachers, I explore ways to rethink how revision is studied and taught by building off the writer’s workshop model, honoring experts like Donald Graves, Don Murray, Lucy Calkins, and Tom Romano.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection took place as I was teaching one class 5 days per week from September through November and consisted of the following: field notes, open-ended questionnaires (prestudy and poststudy), students’ writing notebooks, submitted drafts, and recorded audio- and video-interview transcripts of students engaged in the writing process and writing workshops with peers.

I purposefully selected writing notebooks for students to compose their drafts since I am a firm believer in the notebook as a place to build writing, to reflect on and reread prior entries, and to play with various parts of writing passages. Students could also reference prior drafts and then revise, visually noticing what was in the original writing. Notebooks also helped me as a researcher since I could easily spot revisions. Working with a Word document could not provide the visual translation effect I wanted for the students and for myself. I also feared students would accidentally “accept” tracked changes, and then the revision process would be lost to data collection. Furthermore, teachers at the school shared one laptop cart, which was often requested months in advance; therefore, with

no guarantee that we would have laptops, I believed we could more easily rely on notebooks when writing and revising.

### Data Analysis

Because of its naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) design, this qualitative study had ongoing data analysis, which constantly informed the progression of the study. According to Lincoln and Guba, “Data analysis must begin with the very first data collection, in order to facilitate the emergent design, grounding of theory, and emergent structure of later data collection phases” (p. 242). Particular attention was given to identifiable revision in students’ drafts in their writing notebooks by comparing their original drafts to revised drafts and then to their final drafts for each round of writing. Holistic categories centered on the CARD technique were used to note revisions that could be labeled as change, add, rearrange, and delete. I then reviewed students’ coded audio- and video-interview transcripts, noting open-themed codes regarding the participants’ attitudes and beliefs toward revision during the study. Table 1 summarizes how each of the data sources supported the findings showcased in the next section.

### Process of the Study

I introduced students to a *unit of study* approach to writing, in which they freewrote in writing notebooks, engaged in writer’s workshop, and learned how to read like writers through reading mentor texts in flash fiction, a genre they had never encountered. As noted previously, this genre was broken into three rounds during the study, each lasting approximately 4 weeks and corresponding to the months of September, October, and November.

Flash fiction pieces are between 250 and 750 words (Masih, 2009) and support in-depth connections to the human condition. Writers in this genre rely on shocking their readers, thus allowing them to think about issues outside of the text. Even though short stories require craft and skill

Table 1  
Sources of Data

Data source	Theme	Representative excerpt
Writer’s note-books	Deeper revisions at the macro-structural level	Laura began her flash story with “I should not be telling you this.” Originally, this line appeared at the beginning of the fourth paragraph in her original draft. In her revisions, Laura circled this line and starred it. In her final draft, she placed it as her lead because she wanted the reader to engage with her story quickly and identified that this one line could accomplish that during her revisions.
Open-ended questionnaire (prestudy)	Biggest challenge in revising and realizing why	Tamara said, “The most challenging [part] is probably deleting because I always like what I write[,] but I know some things aren’t needed, and that I also need things to take their place because it just gets kind of confusing.”
Open-ended questionnaire (poststudy)	Revision helps writing	Dylan shared, “I now believe that revision is more necessary in my writing. It helps me improve my stories and I feel more confident and happier.”
Audio transcript of interviews	Change is good	Darin concluded, “It has made me a better writer in seeing what you put down as a draft won’t always stay.”
Video transcript of interviews	Misconceptions of revision	Kari admitted, “Well, I knew what revision was kind of [ <i>groans and laughter from her group</i> ]. No, really, I did, but I didn’t know you could like change everything, so then I was like, ‘Whoa, you can change everything?’ so I like changed stuff, and it made my story like so much better and cooler.” (Kari)
Field notes	“Messiness” equals better revising	I wrote, “Students compared their drafts during revision to see who had the messiest draft.”

to work within the word-limit parameters, this genre may not seem as overwhelming as others for students, especially middle school writers, because flash pieces are much shorter than the typical short story.

I chose flash fiction due to its maximum word count of 750. Revision is an essential component in producing highly effective pieces in this genre due to the space allowed. Word count is an ever-present component in the flash fiction writer's mind and forces the writer to involve subtle writing techniques that are unique to this genre. In this study, these techniques were modeled and learned via reading exemplary mentor texts. Every day in class, students began multiple flash fiction pieces in their writing notebooks and chose to continue or abandon each story. They were also encouraged to continue writing in their notebooks at home each evening, but most chose to only write during class time.

During each round of writing, I did not provide written feedback or grades on students' initial drafts or revisions. Instead, each student attended a writer's workshop in which they used the CARD technique to guide their self-response and peer review. This lack of written teacher feedback was purposeful; I did not want my feedback to influence or steer students' writing in a particular way. I wanted their writing to be based on personal decisions. For example, when they conferred with me, it was simply to talk about their writing and process of revising rather than to receive suggestions from me in the "teacher" role. I explained that each story was their writing, not mine. Students were free to run ideas by me, but I listened instead of telling them what to do. As Murray (2004) noted in reference to revising options, "The primary responsibility for seeing the choices is the student's" (p. 5). I did scan each draft on preselected deadline dates so that Ms. Gardener could keep a running tally of student work completed and provide a weekly completion grade in an online gradebook.

Having students systematically turn in work gave me opportunities to routinely scan their initial and revised drafts, which allowed me to compare them throughout students' revising processes. I scored their finished

drafts in rubric form with the following criteria: (a) title; (b) lead; (c) word count; (d) topic choice; (e) show, not tell; and (f) polished (editing-specific) “final” draft conventions. These criteria were created based on my extensive research in flash fiction (Batchelor, 2012, 2015; Batchelor & King, 2014) and the things editors look for when considering flash pieces for publication (e.g., Masih, 2009).

### **Initial Perspectives on Revision Thinking**

Prior to working with the students, I asked them to complete an open-ended survey about revision. They completed this survey again at the completion of the study. Overwhelmingly, students initially equated revision with editing-specific decisions. Of 26 students, 22 mentioned spelling, punctuation, and capitalization when defining revision. These students noted that revision included finding “errors” in their writing or “fixing” and “correcting” grammatically incorrect aspects while “double or triple checking” the paper. Students also included the term “editing” as part of their definitions. Furthermore, Amy commented that revision was done to papers “in school” while Ben included the “teacher” as part of his definition.

Students’ perceptions of the purpose of revision were not far from their definitions of revision. They included terms like “check,” “fix,” “correct,” and “find,” and they also included “edit[ing]” negative things that they could easily identify, like grammatical fixes. Students included statements about “wrong”ness as well. For example, Randy stated, “The purpose of revision in writing is, um . . . to like correct everything that is wrong in your writing.” Jason agreed, “The purpose of revision is to find mistakes such as misspelling, capitalization, and punctuation.” Moreover, students’ comments describing the easiest or most challenging aspects of revising centered on grammatical concerns, which are microstructural changes that do not affect the meaning or content of the writing. Deeper thinking about making writing better appeared in glimpses on the presurvey, especially centering on adding details. Students expressed

their apprehension, worrying whether decisions would make their writing “correct.” They did not focus on ideas and general meaning for themselves or to the reader.

### The CARD Technique

Because of students’ dislike and misperceptions of revision, I introduced a response technique to better assist them in identifying possible revisions. This technique, which I call the CARD technique, stemmed from the various ways in which students have routinely (in my past experiences as a middle school teacher) talked about revising drafts. Past students had used phrases such as “change,” “switch,” “take out,” and “add”; therefore, I based the CARD acronym on these terms.

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of the acronym. I printed and laminated small note cards of the figure for students to keep clipped in their writing notebooks. They referred to it daily when drafting and revising as well as during conversations in the writer’s workshop with their peers because it could also be used to provide peer-response suggestions.

Figure 1

#### *The CARD Technique*

Your Revision CARD:

Change (e.g., switch point of view; plot events)

Add (e.g., extra parts to include new info, details)

Rearrange (e.g., move around chunks of your story)

Delete (e.g., take out parts that don’t help your story or are confusing)

*Note.* Students received a laminated card with this text.

I also modeled how I might use this technique in my own writing. When working as a writing teacher, I found that when students are able to see me write, think aloud, seek advice, and feel frustration, it makes

the writing process more real, raw, and honest to them. Students can see that writing is not a prepackaged finished draft but rather many drafts and needed revisions to get the writing finished. I modeled my writing to the class days after students had begun revising their own stories; I tried to time the modeling exercise so the revision process would be familiar to students so that they could offer their own comments and thoughts about the activity.

Hooking my laptop to the projector, I shared a first draft of a flash fiction story that I had started and highlighted areas in which I might possibly employ the CARD technique in my own revision process (see Figure 2).

I wanted students to see the process of how I revise in “live time,” so we discussed as a group what the four actions of the CARD technique sound like when metacognitively talking through the process of revising, and specifically what the actions look like if implemented in writing. They shared ideas for me to try, which I noted below the story, and I modeled “aha” moments that came to me during these sharing moments, revising in live time as they watched and assisted me. This sample of my own writing also demonstrates how revising includes questioning and “playing” with writing. The students saw that revising did not require a set answer. They also noticed through my thinking and modeling that I could experiment with revising but did not have to keep a particular change.

For example, the idea of altering the draft from a third-person point of view to first-person point of view seemed intriguing to the students, so we changed the perspective in the first few paragraphs. However, students then commented that they did not like having the child narrator use “I.” They preferred third-person point of view. One student stated that she felt a better “distance” from the child in the story, which allowed her to “see the whole picture of the story.” This distance between the reader and the child seemed to be lost when I switched the point of view to first person. We quickly returned to the original version and began working on other suggestions, such as adding details, and discussed how to revise with

## Figure 2

*Teacher Example Using CARD**Finding Comfort in the Night*

The child shuddered as thunder clapped against the sky. She knew something was out there in the night. Something that shouldn't be. *ADD DIALOGUE?*

She wrapped her pink Care Bear bathrobe tightly against her body, peering through the front porch screen. Nose pressed against the dusty checkered wire, the door jolted forward from her weight. She sprawled onto the top wooden step of her home's landing. Brushing off fallen leaves from the Autumn wind, she took hold of the side rail, delicately placing her toes onto the first step. The floorboard creaked under her weight. First a step, and then a pause. Step, pause. Almost there, she whispered. One more step. One more pause.

There! She reached the sidewalk safely and turned to face home. Her home. The home of wishes and secrets. She glanced up toward the room. The light was on. Still on. Always on. She twirled around on the balls of her feet and inched closer to the lawn. Her toes entered the soggy grass, sinking into the cold, damp Earth. *Add sensory details here?* Lightning streaked across the darkened canvas of the forest wall beyond the boundary of her yard. Looking over her shoulder, she glimpsed an image of him.

Darting across the lawn, swirly pig tails brushing against her cheeks, her breath carried her through the mist, trees passing in her peripheral vision as fast as cars. She stopped, hands on her knees, and panted. *ADD MORE*

She found the spot. The spot where she left him. *ADD MORE* about digging  
Brambles poked out of his contorted sides like a voodoo doll, damp from the evening's downpour. But he was safe, and that was all that mattered. *ADD MORE*  
Her Teddy Bear.

**IDEAS to revise my story:**

**Change:** Change point of view from 3<sup>rd</sup> person to 1<sup>st</sup> person? / Change time of day? / Change title? / Paragraph 3 ending sentence change to "she saw him."?

**Add:** Add more details at the beginning to set time of day? / Maybe enhance sensory details of the smell of rain and grass? / Include digging details about dirt underneath fingernails, earth worms, and so forth, in paragraphs 4/5? / Add something at the end of paragraph 6? / Add dialogue at the beginning maybe?

**Rearrange:** Move around sentences in paragraphs 2/3?

**Delete:** Delete Care Bear bathrobe detail? / Delete sentence about the room with the light part? / Eliminate last paragraph "her teddy bear" ?????

*Note.* How I modeled the CARD technique with my own first draft.

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each in mind. Students were eager to offer ideas to expand my paragraphs, modeling themselves that part of revising can be expanding the original material through thinking and creative play.

Students looked to the CARD technique to share and to discuss how to implement new ideas for revising. As discussed in the next section, the discourse surrounding revising became more about a writer’s intentions and less about the teacher’s intentions. In this way, students began to see that they held ownership of their own work.

### Findings

This section describes three key findings based on conversations with students during the revision process and a review of students’ drafts for all three flash units. These findings were that students (a) mostly revised at the macrostructural level, (b) created personal techniques to assist their revision process that differed from others, and (c) enjoyed “messy” revising.

#### Revisions That Included Macrostructural Changes

I focused on identifiable revision by comparing students’ original drafts to their revised drafts and then to their final drafts. Revisions were separated into holistic categories centering on the four actions of the CARD technique: change, add, rearrange, and delete. In this next section, I share students’ thoughts about how and why they revised their writing according to these categories.

##### *Change*

When the students and I initially talked about change, we narrowed the idea to changing overall core aspects of our writing. This was in part because any revision could be considered change. When a writer deletes a sentence and then inserts a new thought, for example, it could be considered making a change in the writing. Therefore, we had to be specific

when discussing how to change aspects of our writing during revision. We decided that “change” meant changes that would alter the entire premise of a story (and thus the entire piece), such as changes in point of view, setting, characters, or plot events. For example, Maddie wrote about a person winning a contest for travel in a time machine and decided that she would rather have her character go on a mission in which her character had to secretly enter the villains’ “headquarters” and save the day. The notion of time travel appears in a subtle way at the end of her new piece, but she dramatically changed the entire premise of her character’s situation and her character’s actions within that situation, as well as the setting from semifuturistic times on Earth to an entirely different planet that humans settle in the future. Another student, Lexi, noted that she changed the plot of her first flash piece. She said:

I decided to change the plot a bit, that instead of her just running away, her having to kill him. Another decision I made was to decide if I wanted to describe Christopher or leave him being a complete mystery. I also changed the conversation between Catherine and Christopher to explain what happened more so it was clearer to the reader.

Some students switched back to their original perspective, like Joe, who said, “I tried writing my story in first person, but I liked it better in second [how it was originally].” Lexi changed the point of view in her revised version and liked the change. She also believed that it made the story less confusing for the reader. Agreeing with Lexi, Elsa noted that she changed the point of view in her first flash fiction story so “readers could understand it better.” Randy also changed his story’s viewpoint, commenting that the change helped him write his story: “I switched my third-person point of view, which gave me much more ideas, and it was easier.”

It is important to note that over the course of the semester, students began to change the notion of “change”—they began revising to include more minor alterations. For example, in the third round of writing, 12

students discussing the “C” in change noted that they either changed their title or changed their characters’ names. While these are not the holistic changes that the students had been making at the beginning of the semester, the techniques are certainly student decided and student driven; more importantly, they are attributes of how CARD provided self-response strategies. To students, changing a title could possibly be a holistic change. We discussed the power of titles at the beginning of the study in a mini lesson that invited students to consider at least 10 different possible titles for their stories before they finalized one. Most students noted in informal conversations that they waited until revising their drafts to create a title.

### *Add*

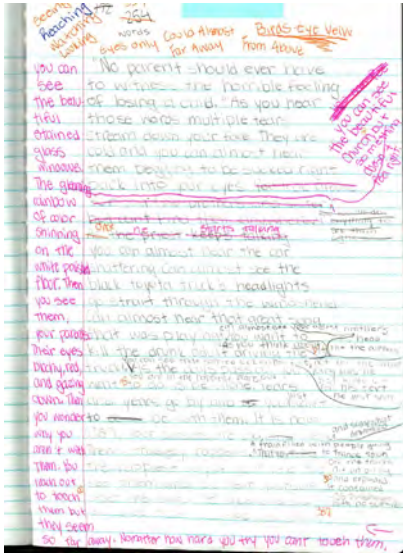
Students found that adding details, events, characters, and overarching ideas extended their stories in the three rounds of writing flash fiction. They expanded their initial drafts to include additional sentences and paragraphs, which are macrolevel revisions. In fact, adding content became the most significant aspect of revision students worked with as a self-response strategy during revising. For example, Molly wanted the reader to not know that her main character, a high school senior, was in a wheelchair until the last sentence, when it would be revealed at the prom. However, Molly realized that it would be more interesting for the reader if hints of this reveal were included along the way, so she revised her story by including subtle clues throughout her piece, such as the beginning line, “As I go down the hall, I can see that everybody is staring at me.” Originally, she had the word “walk” in this sentence and realized that she needed to make this statement vague if she wanted to reveal that her main character was in a wheelchair. She also included extra lines as hints, such as “This school is supposed to have the best program for me . . .” Figure 3 shows an excerpt from this flash piece.

Many students chose to revise penciled first drafts with colored pens, which were available and remained in the classroom if needed. For example, Randy and I conducted a miniconference regarding his second story.

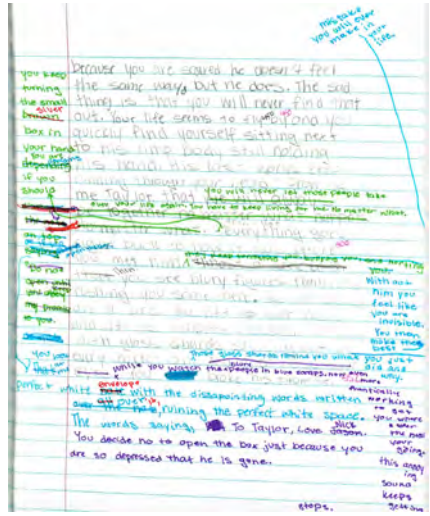


Figure 4  
Color-Coding Revision

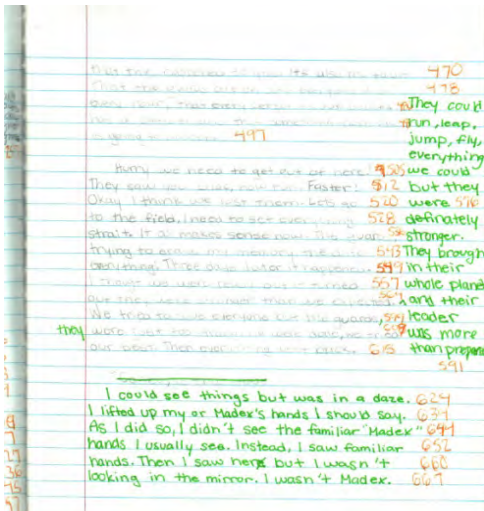
Heather's first flash



Heather's second flash



Heather's third flash



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did not use color in revising, and then it dropped to only five students. Heather's three different flash stories throughout the study show how she found revising in color to be helpful (see Figure 4).

### *Rearrange*

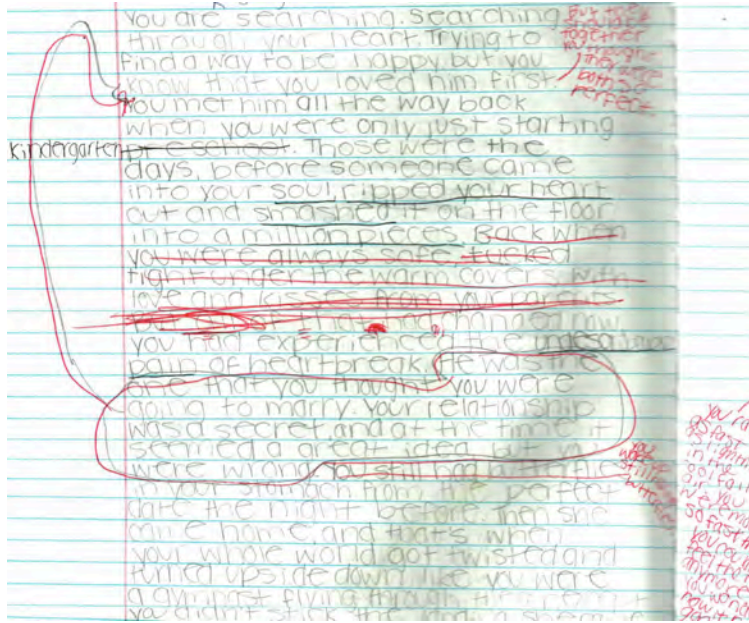
Rearranging was the least used aspect of revision in terms of self-response. In students' first flash round, only nine students mentioned that they considered rearranging during revisions. When discussing rearranging informally with students, they said they found it the most complicated action to practice. For example, Holly stated, "I'm not really sure how to rearrange. It's complicated." Maddie agreed, "It's hard to move big chunks around in your story." Susan noted that she rearranged when typing on the computer rather than in her writer's notebook due to space limitation. Students' concern with rearranging may stem from a lack of practice with this type of revising in their writing. Students may not be given opportunities to know what rearranging looks like in their class assignments or in real-world writing situations outside of school.

When material is moved to a new place in a story, the sentences and passages need to flow with what comes before and after the rearranged material. Some students recognized the potential self-response benefits of rearranging, noting that they rearranged parts of their writing because they wanted to make their writing "flow" or "make it better in another order." However, the few students who practiced rearranging in their writing did so in a macrostructural way, similar to when they practiced adding and holistically changing their writing. Rearrangement was as broad as moving around entire paragraphs or sections, or as small as moving dialogue sentences in conversations. For example, Molly noted that in her first story she moved her second paragraph to where her third paragraph used to be. Dylan also switched paragraphs in his first story, saying, "[I] wanted to switch my second and third paragraphs because I realized that you would probably mention the second before the third in a regular story." Figure 5 shows an example of one student's second flash story, in

which she moved a passage she had written in the middle of her piece toward the beginning.

Figure 5

Student Example of “Rearrange”



While most students spoke about rearranging in terms of switching paragraph order, some chose to rearrange the beginnings and endings and vice versa or even split a story into moveable portions. For example, Darin spent a great deal of time rearranging his second piece. He described his process of rearranging: “I took out most of the middle and reworked that and then split the beginning and end. It was together at first and then I split that up, so it went from present to flash back to present again.” Even though it was the least used and least mentioned self-response technique, the students who did use it found that it improved the overall quality of their writing.

*Delete*

Because flash fiction has a maximum word count of 750 words, students routinely engaged in deleting to meet this requirement. Throughout students' drafts, numbers appeared in columns alongside the writing. These numbers were based on counting the number of words in each line and then totaling them at the end of their drafts. Students who "overwrote" the story found that they had to delete portions of their drafts, which meant they had to be more concise in their thinking. When I asked Alison if flash fiction was a challenge because of the word limit, she stated, "It was a challenge because I had over 150 words over, more than 150 over. It was pretty hard because you just feel like every little detail matters, so that's why it was hard for me." Randy also explained his going over the word limit. Below is an excerpt of our conversation:

Randy: So I think I'm going to delete a bunch of lines that were unneeded, like they were just useless space I think, like I deleted "you remember all the good times you had with your brother." And I just put, "He is nowhere to be found. You remember when he got tired of playing." Like, instead of talking about all the good times he had instead.

Researcher: Nice.

Randy: I also deleted, "You remember where he could possibly be." Because that wasn't really needed. Because next it says, "You and your friend were looking for your brother. All you guys were doing was playing hide and seek." I love that line.

Researcher: Yeah, you gotta keep that line. And so the line before or after might be redundant? Is that what you're saying?

Randy: Yeah, the line after the beginning and then before "All you guys were doing . . ."

Like Randy, most students decided to delete unnecessary details or parts of their stories because either they did not contribute to the story, they did not make the story "sound very good," or they "were confusing to friends" who read their stories, all of which are terrific self-response strategies of deletion



decisions. Holly explained that she deleted a “big chunk” out of her second essay. I asked her if she missed the chunk she deleted, and she responded, “Not really. I think it makes it better because I wasn’t really sure about it. And I didn’t like it, so I just decided to take it out.” Sifting through students’ revisions, I realized that many deletion examples included students “x”ing or crossing out entire paragraphs that they no longer felt were necessary. For example, below is Susan’s first page of her flash piece, in which she drew an “x” over an entire passage without returning to it again in her rewrite (see Figure 6).

Furthermore, students’ processes were different when they chose to delete and to possibly rewrite a section. Figure 7 shows two examples of how students deleted passages but then reworked their writing.

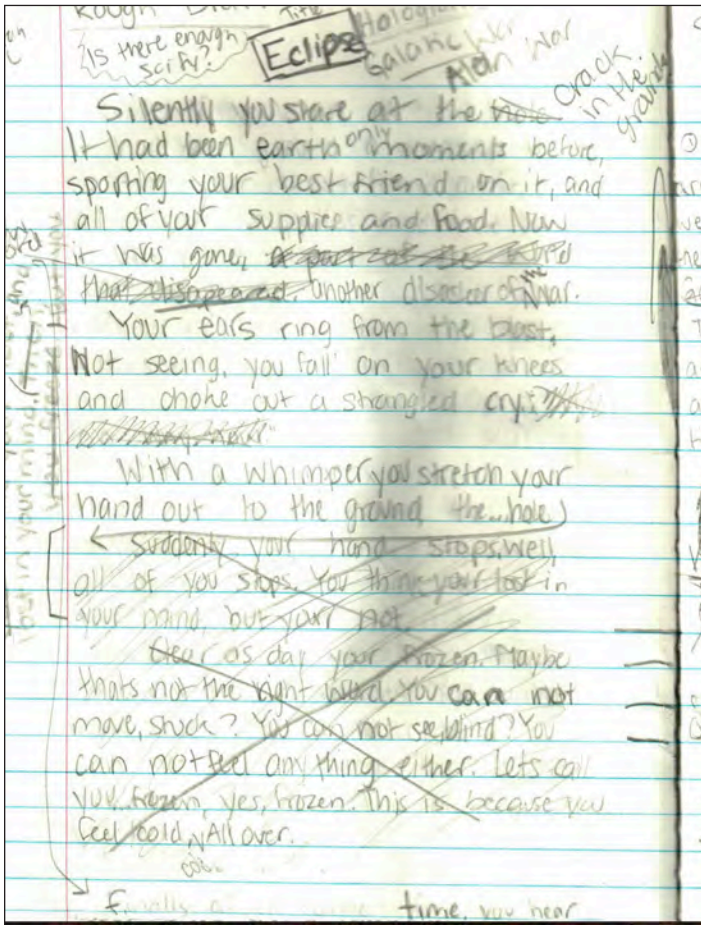
The image on the left shows how Jason struck through sentences but then wrote over the lines he made. The second image shows Maddie’s deletions: She chose to write in the margins after she struck through material.

Nikki noted that when she deleted something, she looked for a balance. Describing her first story, she explained, “I deleted a lot of extra details that might not have been needed. I made sure I took out enough, but not too much so the story wasn’t boring.” Most importantly, deletions stemmed from students’ internal decision-making processes. Students ultimately made the decision on whether to keep something if they “didn’t like it” or “it didn’t make sense” to them after they revised it. Deletions were self-selected and consisted mostly of sentence and paragraph deletions. Few deletions were word substitutions or word deletions. Instead, students centered their revisions on larger alterations that occurred beyond the word level.

### Personal Techniques of Revising

Regarding how students processed revision, 12 students chose to make personal memos to themselves in the margins of drafts about how they should revise, sometimes even posing questions to themselves or doodling images. For example, annotations included personal directives

Figure 6  
 Student Example of “Delete”



to help them remember where to revise in their rough drafts, such as Kari writing the following comments in her margins: “Add!,” “switch,” and “add more to lead.” Molly wrote on her second flash piece, “details, take out!” Heather provided a range of word options in a word bank she created at the top of her rough draft, in which she listed “seeing, reaching, watching,

Batchelor, K. E. (2022). Using the “CARD” technique to assist middle school students in the revision process. *Journal of Response to Writing, 8*(1), 43–80.



[and] looking.” (She decided to use “reaching” in her final draft.) Susan wrote in large letters at the top of the last page in her second flash piece “REVISION WORK,” indicating she needed to work more on her ending section. Rory wrote in the margin of his second flash piece the words “change, add, rearrange, and delete” to remind himself of these self-response strategies. He also posed a question at the top of the draft, asking, “point of view of victim?”

Other students posed questions throughout their pieces, too. For example, Alison directed herself to consider removing the specific hourly times she had throughout her second flash story, asking “remove times?” She also noted, “add onomaopias?” [*sic*; onomatopoeias] and “add details?” in the beginning of her draft. Students also questioned their titles by noting “title?” or “keep title?” Other students brainstormed various titles from which to select one for their final draft at the tops of their revisions. Sandra asked herself whether she wanted to keep sections of her stories by noting “keep?” where she thought about removing parts.

Reading through student revisions, I wondered whether some of the questions were posed to me or to their peers during the writer’s workshop times, or whether they were self-pondering questions. For example, Susan wrote in her third story’s margin, “Is there enough sci-fy [*sic*]?” When I asked Susan if that question was meant for me, she said it was a reminder to ask her peers. This reveals that she valued her opinion as well as her peers’ opinions over my opinion, steering the revision-making decisions away from the teacher and more toward the individual. The CARD technique also provides students with opportunities to engage with the power of both self-response as well as peer review in their writing.

Furthermore, two students drew images during revising moments in class. To represent the key points she wanted to express in her draft, Susan sketched the following symbolic images: a coffin; a drink with steam coming off the top; “CNN” in large, bubbled letters; and the word “sickness” in bubbled letters with the words “red blood” next to it. Her piece centered

on a sci-fi horror flash in which the end of the world was near due to a plague infected by drinking water. Dave sketched two images side by side of the race car he had sculpted. One depicted the car intact while the other showed a heaping mess of the same car after a collision, which was the premise of his flash fiction.

### “Messiness” as a Badge of Honor

The writing during revising became messy. At first, students apologized that their writing was messy in drafts. For example, Amy commented as she watched me flip through her notebook to find her current draft, “Yeah, it’s really messy now that I’ve done stuff to it.” However, after rounds of writing, it almost became a sign of pride for students that their stories were indeed messy, and they began to view it as an indication that they had revised and changed their writing. In writer workshops, students compared who had the messiest journals and laughed about it. However, this messiness did not seem to distract them from rewriting, nor did it affect how their peers read their writing when they exchanged notebooks or read stories aloud to one another. Figure 8 depicts a writing group sharing each other’s stories.

Additionally, Figure 9, a page in Allison’s notebook, reveals her style of revising and highlights the messy display of revisions that she stated did not interfere with her thinking or writing.

### Students’ Attitudes and Perceptions of Revision Poststudy

At the conclusion of the study in November, students were given the same open-ended questionnaire they had answered in September. Students’ new definitions of revision were dramatically different than their original ones. Most noticeable was the eliminated idea of correcting grammatical concepts, which students had previously included in their earlier definitions. This time, only two students incorporated notions of editing for grammar as part of revision, whereas before 20 students had included grammar as part of their definitions. Additionally, in the poststudy survey

Figure 8

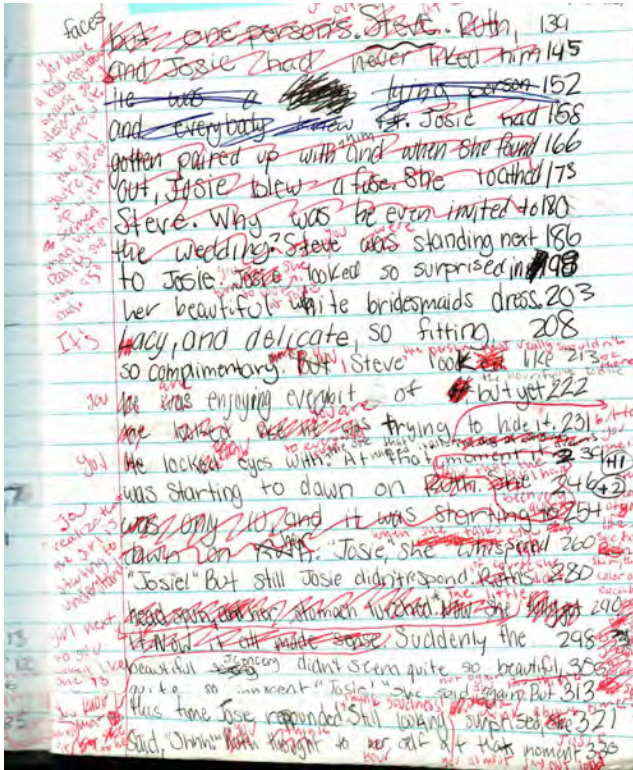
*Students Collaborating During a Writing Workshop*



13 students identified the CARD technique as a component of revision. Dylan stated, “Revision is when you change, add, rearrange, or delete elements of a piece of writing.” Molly wrote, “[Revision is] the process of going back over a piece of writing and changing it, adding things to it, rearranging things in it, and taking things away from it.” Elsa also included CARD aspects to her definition, but she further noted that revision is done during the act of writing. She wrote, “Revision is the act of changing, adding, deleting, or moving parts of our story. You revise while you write.” Other results included 15 students identifying revision as bettering or improving writing, and 11 students identifying holistic terms in their definitions. For example, Kassie defined revision as “a way to improve or look over your writing that will benefit the piece.”

Figure 9

## Allison’s Example of Revising



Initially, students’ process of revising had consisted of reading a story over for misspelled words, fixing punctuation, reading it backwards, and having adults check their work. Poststudy responses transformed these notions: Students described their process of revising in terms of using the CARD technique as well as having peers read their work, which theme did not appear in prestudy responses. Sandra noted, “I use the CARD method after reading [my story] through. After that, I have a friend read it for feedback.” Amy stated, “First I read it aloud and then I fix the things

Table 2  
*Students' Processes of Revision in their Writing, Prestudy and Poststudy*

	Prestudy	Poststudy
<b>Lexi</b>	The process that I use when revising my writing is I go through and make sure there are no spelling errors and grammar [errors] and then I try to add in things like figurative language or like details and stuff that I can do.	First change the title, which makes me think about the story, which gets me going, and think about the story and then I will delete things and then add, and change words, and then, I'll add before all that, I'll rearrange.
<b>Joe</b>	I revise my writing by correcting any punctuation mistakes and capitalization errors and lastly, I read through it and make sure it makes sense.	I make sure I like it. Then I change it to make it better.
<b>Alison</b>	When I revise my writing, I usually read through it first and then if I see any apparent mistakes, if I skim through it, that are easily noticeable like spelling, I would change it then and then I'll actually read it and fix my commas and apostrophes and my periods. And then I will usually ask my mom to check it as well.	I . . . 1. look to see good details to add. 2. delete a <u>bunch</u> of words. 3. change a couple of things. 4. and sometimes rearrange.
<b>Erika</b>	I revise my writing by reading over my work, check for spelling and grammatical errors, and rewrite it.	I read over my story and change the things I want changed.

I want to fix and change stuff and delete stuff and then I have friends read it so they can help me decide on things that I cannot decide on.” Susan described her revision process as follows:

When I revise my writing, I read through it and underline parts I don't like and then I like circle them or underline them and then come back to them when I'm done



reading the story. I will then shoot them out or change them and then I reread the story. Then, if I like it, I keep it.

Students’ poststudy comments about the ease and challenges of revising indicate they were thinking about revising in a holistic manner. Table 2 illustrates four students’ changes in their revision process prestudy to poststudy. This comparison shows that students’ original revising focused mainly on grammatical issues, but at the end of the study, the students’ ideas regarding revision centered on what they wanted to change by adding details, deleting portions of the work, and thinking about writing in a deeper, more personal manner than before their experiences with CARD.

At the beginning of the study students’ comments on ease of revising centered on grammatical issues, but at the end students focused on the aspects of revision that were easiest to them. The two most stated aspects of revision that were easiest for students to implement were “add” ( $n = 12$ ) and “change” ( $n = 9$ ). Kassie stated that adding details was the easiest part of revision for her because “there’s always endless possibilities about where you can go with your story and what you can add.” Change also became a common factor in students’ perceived ease of revising. Holly said that changing things was the easiest part of revising for her, saying, “There’s a lot of things that I think they’re really good, and then I look back and say, ‘Why did I do this?’ And so I change a lot of stuff, and then I go, ‘Oh, there needs to be something there to explain that.’”

A few students commented that deleting was the easiest part of revising, and Molly added that the beginning of the revision process was the easiest stage of revision. She shared, “The easiest part is the first time you revise because there’s always so much to do. It’s never perfect the first time you do it.” Molly’s comment also suggests that students revised continuously over a long duration of time rather than revising only during a portion of class time, which is ultimately what many teachers ask students to do.

In contrast to the ease of revision, students revealed that their most challenging part of revising included deleting and rearranging. Elsa stated

that she found deleting challenging because she did not “want to get rid of [her] work.” Amy agreed, explaining, “It’s kind of hard to let go of sentences that you thought were good.” Tamara also focused on deletion, noting, “The most challenging [part] is probably deleting because I always like what I write, but I know some things aren’t needed and that I also need things to take their place because it just gets kind of confusing.”

Furthermore, students claimed that rearranging was a difficult concept for them to practice and one that few students routinely used. One reason for this could be that students did not necessarily know how to implement the process of rearranging. Holly noted, “The most challenging part is rearranging because I don’t know what to rearrange because sometimes, I think my writing is in a really good order and so I don’t really know what could be moved, so I’m not really sure how to rearrange yet.” Kassie agreed, saying, “The most challenging part of revision is rearranging because I think it’s kind of hard to pick out parts you want to move and all that.”

### **Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research**

Students’ attitudes and perceptions demonstrated that while they initially believed revision to be more editing specific, at the end of the study, students shared that revision should be more holistic, centering on transforming content and ideas to produce stronger writing. The CARD technique became the primary discourse in how students talked about revision. They could specifically notice and name what they wanted to do to revise. Sharing the common ground of four main actions (e.g., changing, adding, rearranging, and deleting) writers in the class used to revise made it easier for students to describe the decisions they made when they revised. As students were able to make sense of the intricacies and complications of revision, their newfound knowledge increased conversation among peers in writer’s workshops, contributed to students’ personal revisions, and impacted their overall attitudes toward the revision process.

The CARD technique also gave students various ways to work with revision, and while most students focused on changing, adding, rearranging, and deleting, it is worth noting that a few students chose to draw their revisions first. Students made their revisions colorful, noticeable, and visual to capture the purpose of each revision (e.g., the reason they altered the piece or the new part’s role in the revised draft).

Additional research is needed on the long-term effect of teaching revision techniques to students and whether students use these techniques as they move forward in their schooling. Further research might include a longitudinal study gathering students’ attitudes toward revision as they progress in their English classes as well as in other content areas. Revision should be implemented whenever students write, regardless of subject area, and it is essential that educators allow the opportunity for revision during the writing process both in the classroom as well as outside school, allowing and encouraging students to revisit their writing via repeated drafts.

By providing time in class for revising as well as using specific ways to reevaluate student writing (e.g., CARD), educators can help students view their own writing as a work in progress. As students adopt this view, they will notice the power of returning to their drafts as they focus on content rather than the superficial elements needed during the final editing process. This internalization of progress and process in their writing will continue to shape good writing habits overall. Additionally, the revision process can be rewarding to young writers if educators can provide spaces in which they teach students to value student-driven thinking rather than the wants of others (e.g., writing to please the teacher).

When educators encourage students to revise using the CARD technique and to look at and work through their writing without penalty, revision will no longer become the dreaded “r” word. Instead, it will be seen as a much-needed, appreciated process for navigating the way students think and understand what they write.



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