

## The Tonight Show with Marisa Pipke

How to Revise Your Writing

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### Introduction

The following paper comes from a class where students were asked to write something related to class content but in a creative, risk-taking way. This assignment called for the students to explore a topic related to writing where some form of change in thinking had occurred. Students were also asked to imagine scenarios in which they could present class content in a fun, accessible way.

*Keywords:* Revision, formatting, editing, reading



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**In an alternate reality** where writers can achieve celebrity cult status on the same plane as Brad Pitt or Marilyn Monroe, I host The Tonight Show with Marisa Pipke on NBC. On the scheduled slot for the April 8th, 2020 show, several celebrities were guests and had the rare opportunity to debate their opinions surrounding the process of revision in writing. All of this happened in front of a live audience, and as you will see, anything is possible when it is live. Below is my account of the taping.

“From 30 Rockefeller Plaza here in New York City, it’s The Tonight Show with Marisa Pipke!” The announcer trumpets my introduction as I walk on stage. The in-house band finishes my theme song, and I immediately start the show with introductions of that night’s guests: “Thank you for joining us tonight! Now, would everyone please give it up for Leah McClellan, Nancy Sommers, and Donald Murray!” The crowd cheers as the guests take their seats on a couch beside my desk.

“Thank you so much for being here tonight. Now, as you know, I would like to discuss proofreading and revising strategies. I know I am personally guilty of writing one long rough draft, doing one quick once-over for any obvious grammar errors, and then handing it in,” I confess as the crowd laughs. “But I know that isn’t right, and my work could be better. These past few months, I have taken it upon myself to take my time in reading over and revising my final drafts of essays quite a few times, but what exactly do you suggest, Nancy?”

“It is a matter of looking at the kernel of what I have written, the content, and then thinking about it, responding to it, making decisions, and actually restructuring it,” Nancy replies steadily (383).

Leah shakes her head and interjects, “If the errors are too big or too many, I’m outta there!” (McClellan). The crowd laughs, and I interject, “Well, that’s an awfully broad statement, Leah! What the heck is ‘big’ or ‘many’ errors supposed to look like? After all, I know I certainly struggle with comma placement even after attempting to proofread my work!”

“Proofreading your work can be challenging, it’s true,” Leah responds, “If you have a system, though, proofreading can be like doing a quality check on an assembly line” (McClellan).

I nod in understanding. “Hmm, a system, I see. Like having a scientific approach. But that takes all of the fun out of the creative process!”

Donald nods along and interrupts: “Effective editing is usually the result of three separate and distinct readings!” (“Effective Editing”).

Leah, Nancy and I turn to Donald.

“Three? Who has time for three?” I reply. “I can barely complete one reading without getting fed up with my writing! But if we’re getting scientific on The Tonight Show tonight, then please, be my guest.”

Donald begins to describe his method.

“The first read is for meaning. The second read is for order. The third read is for voice, language, and conventions” (“Effective Editing”).

Nancy shakes her head furiously at Donald and turns to him. “Writers describe their primary objective when revising as finding the form or shape of their argument” (Sommers 384).

I attempt to find common ground to keep the peace between my guests. After all, I wouldn’t want another screaming match like the one we had between Trudeau and Trump when they discussed their forms of address in their statements about terrorist attacks.

“Honestly, these both sound pretty similar.” I surmise. “Donald, you think that I should use each proofread with a different goal in mind every time. Nancy, throughout my proofreading, you are suggesting that I always remember what the purpose of my writing is so that I don’t go off-topic.”

Nancy and Donald both nod, and Nancy smiles apologetically at Donald and replies, “During the first revision cycle [a writer’s] attention is primarily directed towards narrowing the topic and delimiting their ideas. At this point, [writers] are not as concerned as they are later about vocabulary and style” (“Effective Editing”).

There is a light smatter of applause from the audience. I pause to gather my thoughts, and summarize, “Okay, so if I’m hearing this right, the first draft and proofread should just be about the content and making sure it’s coming across okay. The second draft and proofread should be about organizing my thoughts in some sort of order that makes sense, and then the third read-through and proofread is all about grammar and punctuation. But wait, I usually proofread after my first draft anyways! I feel like I usually just combine the two.”

The crowd laughs, and Leah shakes her head. She responds, “Don’t proofread until you’re completely finished with the actual writing and editing” (McClellan).

“Good God,” I reply, “Writing a paper will take eons!”

Leah sympathetically adds, “If you do make a last-minute change to a few words, be sure to check the entire sentence or even paragraph over again” (McClellan).

I put my head down and exclaim, “I take it back. Writing an essay will take even longer than an eon! It will take multiple eons!” The crowd laughs enthusiastically. “Or

maybe just one giant eon. Like an eonnnnnn. Is that a thing? Because that should definitely be a thing!”

I pause to allow the crowd to settle down and turn towards my guests. “Well, tonight has been an absolute pleasure. I have to say I have learnt a lot tonight and will take these tips forward into other areas of my life.” I turn towards the camera and say, “Thank you for your time, I’m your host Marisa Pipke, and this has been The Tonight Show with Marisa Pipke!”

“WAIT!” A woman shouts from somewhere in the crowd. “What about proofreading backwards?!”

“Excuse me?” I call out into the audience and spot a woman in the middle aisle. “What is your name?” I yell back.

“Anna! I’m so sorry, but I couldn’t let you end the show without letting you know that your third proofread should be done by reading your work from bottom to top!”

“Bottom to top?” I ask in confusion. The audience has begun whispering amongst themselves.

“Yes, bottom to top!” Anna cries back. “If you read your work starting from the very last sentence and work your way to your first sentence, you won’t get distracted by the content and will concentrate on the spelling, grammar, and punctuation!” Anna smiles and sits back down, satisfied with herself.

I look around at the audience, my producer shrugs his shoulders at me, and I turn towards Anna. “Well,” I call back, “That is possibly the weirdest tip I have ever learnt in writing. But strangely, it also sounds like the most helpful. I’ll be sure to do that, Anna.” I turn my attention back to the camera monitor. “And with that, that’s our show! Take care, everyone!” I stand and bow with my other guests.

## Works Cited

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