

RADICAL REVISION CHECKLIST (for revising Drafts During Radical Revisions Phase):

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**Parts of this checklist (“Part 2: Beyond the Central Constraints” below) were adapted from a radical revisions checklist made by poet/teacher/essayist Rob Halpern for his students at Bard College’s Language & Thinking Program and subsequently altered since then by myself, and others who have taught with Rob for the L&T program. Hence, this checklist initially by Rob has been tailored to fit the final project needs of this class.

My version of this checklist separates into two parts.

The second part is more directly adapted from Rob Halpern’s checklist, and is meant as series of reminders and approaches to help you radically revise drafts of your final project. More succinctly, it lists things for you to check/consider as you get to completing a first full draft of your final project. Each of these relates to a component part, an approach to the writing, or some items of language that each final project would, I feel, be better off to include, consider, contain, or otherwise take on in some way.

The first part of this checklist speaks directly to the central constraints of our projects, so directly reminds us of the things I (d) am requiring each project to include.

Radical revision is wholesale reconstruction and development. This does not mean tinkering with lines, but rather genuine rewriting and deepening. If you cling to what you’ve already done, be it because you think it is already good enough or because you feel you’ve invested too much time in what you’ve composed, your writing will not improve in the way it needs to. – Rob Halpern

PART 1) CENTRAL CONSTRAINTS CHECKLIST:

1. Have I developed my final project into an whole of related parts, or an “aesthetic ecosystem” (the combination of written/page and off the page elements) that responds to the central constraints initially laid out for this project, in addition to whatever else my work desires to respond to? That is, have I adequately thought through and gotten roughly figured out the relation between all the elements of my performative/performance piece, including the context, the live or recorded performance elements beyond the page itself, the moment of direct collaboration, the research, and the citation of two-plus course texts, and (of course) the writing itself? Have I gotten a handle, that is, on what my project entails insofar as I have thought through the necessary relationship between page and off the page elements? Related:
2. Does my final project—the written page and off the page elements (performance and context)—allow for particular conflicts or interesting tensions to emerge, conflicts or tensions between what I’ve written and the performance of that writing? That is, does my final project’s different elements directly relate and “speak” (respond) to one another in ways that make each element feel somehow “necessary” (not extraneous or duplicative of another element)?
3. Is my project based substantially in written form but written to be performed, i.e., is the written the main/central medium my performative / performance writing project is based in, and out of which performance results? Related: has the writing of my final project “found a form or forms on the page” (an architecture, a shape or set of textual shapes) that I am happy with or otherwise interested in continuing to develop and perform from?
4. Do I know what context (a social space) my final project will make use of? And do I have a good sense as to why I have chosen this particular social space to be the one that my final project draft will make substantial contact with (remember: making use of a social space, intervening in it, can amount to making that space the

site/place for the live or recorded performance of the piece, or can involve being the place or places that the piece is “placed” or handed out in, or can involve where part or all of the piece is written in—as long as the the space is “public,” intervening really means “some form of interaction with.”)?

5. Does my final project make use of at least one element/form of direct collaboration with group partners and/or others?
6. Do I know how, or have some handle on how, why, where, and when the writing of my final project will be performed? Or: do I know how, why, where, and when the writing will be performative in such a manner as to creatively interpret or respond to the central constraints and overall questions and themes of this course?
7. Does the writing of my final project make use of the direct or indirect citation of two or more assigned texts (citation can mean riffing on, quoting, paraphrasing, or otherwise playing with the language of another text in an acknowledged way)? Are the texts I am citing given adequate acknowledgment within the written text of my final project (find creative but responsible ways to do this—MLA need not be used, and in fact is discouraged: invent your own methods for citing and acknowledging texts and let this be one of the creative formal elements of your writing).
8. Have I made sure to do some research—online, library, observational, etc—to produce and develop the writing and other elements of my final project? Research is vital for any writing, including creative writing. To both find new language as well as to develop a richer sense of your own curiosities and passions, research thus becomes necessary. Tip: find moments you are least clear about something in your draft, particularly during moments at which you are referring directly or indirectly to concrete, factual, or historical items of language—research, for example, a name of an author you are citing, or the name of a place you are performing the work in (perhaps this is a street name, for example).

PART 2) BEYOND THE CENTRAL CONSTRAINTS, IMPORTANT PROJECT REMINDERS CHECKLIST:

- Is my draft clearly motivated by my own curiosity and concerns?
- Does my thinking change from beginning to end? Does the draft perform the ‘transport’ of my ideas? Does it move me? Does it move the reader/audience/participant?
- Does my draft writing begin with a *particular* “image” such as an alliteration, a vivid elision, a metaphor, or some other detail or anecdote—does this project draft open with an “establishing shot,” to use Rob’s phrase) that helps to engage the reader and open up the scene of inquiry or engagement? Does my draft pull the reader in immediately?
- Have I located my central questions or scenes of inquiry? Do my central questions or scenes of inquiry (my “centers of gravity”) emerge from an engagement with the texts we have read and the writing (weekly experiments) we have done in this course?
- On question and provisional (non-certain) responses: Recall that artworks such as our poems and fiction pieces “argue” in all manner of overt and implied ways, and so question in all manner of ways: Have I provided a provisional response to my questions early on in the piece (as opposed to at the very end)? This may occur in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Responding to one’s questions can be come in the form of making metaphor to develop and explore questions, elision, implied and so often less overt claims or poetic statements, or by making more complex the initial inquiry with more questions, but nonetheless: have I responded to my own questions soon after posing them? Related:

*Do I return to and fully engage my concerns, ideas, images, and questions (returning can mean thru use of poetic repetition, for example—to again remind us that “questions” need not have a question mark at the end, and responses need not be in the form of sentences!)?

- Does my title introduce the writing, and in fact the overall performative piece (including the project’s past and future performance) in an engaging way?
- If I include an epigraph (a starting quote by one of the authors I’ve engaged with), does it help to orient the reader’s attention? Or enrich, or otherwise help frame the audience’s/participants’ engagement?
- When I use a category term (“love” or “man” or “face” or “big” for example), am I being specific and not assuming the meaning of these terms for the reader/audience? Am I developing more general terms or replacing them with more unusual language, am I editing in the direction of “making language strange”?

[NOTE: The above point is particularly important, so I expand on it a bit here. Specificity, and particularly “making language strange” is not *just* to relish in language and to play and invent as poets for the sake of it (though it is for that also, certainly). Rather, often going more specific and yet more unusual involves trying to avoid *assuming the meaning or significance of a piece of language, and/or defining terms for the reader*: assumptions often lead to general or self-certain claims, or to clichés, stereotypes, or other sorts of “grand” judgment. And so: am I defining terms using sense data / sensuous language—making metaphor, example—and/or questioning how I use general terms or category words as I go? Am I making the general more particular, even where I’m not defining words per se? Am I trying to otherwise find ways to make less general those words/terms that can problematically turn into stereotype, particularly as relates to identity categories? Let the reader decide what “man” or “face” means to them making language strange and NOT simplistic (“I love men” isn’t interesting to the reader unless it “love” or “men” is somehow developed, given specificity later, or such as by turning on its head what “love” in this imaginary poem refers to, allowing for a known and general word to be questioned as such by the reader. I choose this example because it in itself the line is not necessarily excluding anyone or necessarily offensive—but it lacks any surprise, stays on the level of generality and assumption, so goes nowhere by itself).]

- Does the draft adequately develop, explicate, paraphrase, or comment on my cited passages in a way that furthers my own ideas, including but not limited to the ideas I have about the texts I am citing?
- Have I used at least two textual sources from the texts we’ve read in this class? And have I cited these texts in a way that furthers my own ideas, or are these moments of citation left dangling, unexplored or unacknowledged as cited (copied)? Do these moments of citation feel “out of place”?
- Have I included references to any OTHER outside sources (sources outside of class — passages from texts, for example, that I find compelling and worth consideration for this particular project but that we did not read together)? Does my piece seem to desire such reference? If so, what references are you thinking of and how might you use them?
- Is the language, aside from cited quotations, my own? (Remember our conversation week 2-3, citation as creative ethical action: the creative ways one can cite, paraphrase, or use direct quotes, i.e., acknowledge the person or persons who wrote what is being quoted, and acknowledge the source text, doing so clearly but thru use of conventions that you’ve invented or are different from MLA, for example).
- Have I already practiced performing or reading aloud and marking my writing up (with others, preferably, helping) as I go along? Now read through your draft again and examine each line. At each point, ask: is it “weak”? Is it “strong”? Is it “necessary”? Evaluate them on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the strongest, and “unnecessary” where the line or performance move feels like it can be cut. (Try doing this also with your performance gestures, with images, and any other performative element of your piece—once you get to practicing the whole of the performance). Revise accordingly.

- Does my draft end in a place other than where it began? Have I presented a new, transformed question or questions, image, concern, etc, for the reader? For myself? Have I evoked new curiosities for myself as well as for the reader? (Do NOT merely restate initial thoughts, images, metaphors or questions at the end, UNLESS there is reason to make such a deliberate formal choice, unless, i.e., returning to an image or line or metaphor or certain set of gestures is what the performative/performance piece ultimately DESIRES.)

(revisions checklist adapted from Rob Halpern, L&T 2008)