



# ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR REVISION

Ready to revise?  
Begin with these questions.



BY ANICA MROSE RISSI

**C**ongratulations: You made it through the draft of your story or novel! Then you put it aside for a few weeks or months, to give yourself some distance before revising. Great. Now you've taken it back out, read it through, and made some notes, and you're ready to dig in on revisions – *real* revisions, not just surface changes. Excellent! Here are some questions to ask yourself, the answers to which will guide your way.

■ **Why did I write this?**

No, really – what fundamental, underlying questions, tensions, fears, or emotions did you wish to explore when you set out to write this story? What others arose in you along the way? I'm not asking about the plot or what problems your characters face – I'm asking what brought *you* to this story and made you want – nay, need – to write it in the first place. What were you exploring as you moved through the draft? What kept you going back to it, day after day?

■ **What makes this a story only I can tell?**

We could argue over how many kinds of plots are in the world, or if any new sto-

ries can ever be told, but I'm not going to let you procrastinate that way. Instead, ask yourself what exactly you bring to this story – and these sentences – that makes it uniquely *yours*. How can you bring out more of that in revision? (And if it's not really yours, then why are you telling it?)

■ **What universal truth is at this story's core?**

The more personal and specific you can make it, the more broadly it will resonate.

■ **What are the emotional stakes for each character?**

How can you raise them? And in what ways does each character's emotional arc shape or affect the plot, or vice versa?

■ **What emotional arc will the reader experience?**

Beat by beat over the course of the story, what do you want the reader to be thinking, feeling, wondering, and rooting for? What do you want them to walk away from it thinking, feeling, wondering, questioning, or understanding? Where does the reader's emotional arc follow that of the main character, and in what ways do they differ?

■ **Where does the real story begin?**

How much of what came before it does the reader need to know, and when?

■ **What's happening in or during the story that is not on the page?**

Especially: What are your secondary characters – who are the main characters of their own stories, adjacent to this one – experiencing concurrent to this?

■ **What else can I leave out?**

What details, scenes, adjectives, backstories, manifestos, explanations, and descriptions have you

included that were necessary for you to write but aren't necessary for the reader to read?

■ **What's missing?**

If you read your story like a reader, not like its author, what will you experience? How much of what you intended to write is truly present on the page?

■ **What space have I left for the reader?**

Do you trust your reader? Fully? If not: In what ways do you need to strengthen the story – and your writing – so you can?

■ **What snacks and rewards will power me through this?**

I'm partial to cheese, chocolate, and walks with my dog, but every writer – and every book – needs something different.

—Anica Mrose Rissi is the author of the *Anna*, *Banana* chapter-book series; the picture books *Watch Out for Wolf!*, *The Teacher's Pet*, and *Love, Sophia on the Moon*; and the young adult novels *Always Forever Maybe* and *Nobody Knows But You*. Follow her on Twitter and Instagram at @anicarissi.



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