

Revision Lessons: Student Writing

Christian Garcia is a junior at the Urban Peace Academy High School in New York City. Here are two versions of his poem "I Am From." The *before* version was written during a five-minute freewrite, and the *after* version was written in 20 minutes using the revision interview technique.

Before

The first draft of Christian's poem was very short. Christian's writing teachers asked him a few questions to help him get started on his revisions.

I AM FROM

I am from rock descent
Don't care and look at the world from the front seat.


I am from Dia de Los muertos
From mourning of the ones who have fallen
To happy birthday C.J.

I am from pencil and colored paper
Where the circles never end in my mind

I am a never-ending space with black holes
and built-up meteors ready to explode
Yet a gentle gaze up at the stars.

I am what I am.
I am Christian Garcia
Punk rocker, rap city thug, writer/artist, world traveler

But most of all, I am Me!



what exactly do you mean by "rock descent"? I don't understand that part.

what does "happy birthday" have to do with dia de los muertos? How do you celebrate your birthday? can you tell me more?

what do you do with pencil and colored paper? why do you love them so much?

I like the contrast of black holes and meteors with stars, but it's not enough. I want to know more. why did you write this?

where do you dream of going? where would you go if you could travel the world?

Conduct Your Own Revision Interview

Have you ever had the experience that you're not really sure how you're feeling or what you're thinking? Then a friend asks you the right questions and gets you talking? Revision can sometimes be like that. The next time you're not sure how to fix a piece of your writing, try doing a revision interview.

1. Read your work aloud to a friend.
2. Have your friend ask you questions about your work. (This is the interview part.)
3. Answer each question aloud, and have your friend take notes of what you're saying.
4. Use your friend's notes as a map to guide you in your revision process.



Fact File

STUDENT WRITER

Name: Christian Garcia, age 17

School: Urban Peace Academy, New York City

Favorite books: The Crow series, by Norman Partridge

Favorite quote: "All's fair in love and war."

After

The changes that Christian made to his poem were a result of the answers he gave to his teachers' questions.

I AM FROM

I am from rock descent
 A troubled young mind like the side of a crumbling mountain
 With the sound of guitar strings
 And drums echoing in the far scopes of my mind
 Take me to the edge of Everest
 To look at the world from a front-view seat.

To Christian, "rock descent" means rock music. There's always music playing in his mind. He added these lines to show his readers his connection to music.

I am from Dia de los muertos
 For mourning the dead, parading with papier-mâché skulls
 Overlooking the people as they taste the tequila, bitter yet warm
 Or for waiting by the stoop
 Hearing Mom and Dad sneak up the steps
 Trying to surprise CJ with gifts and balloons for his birthday.

Christian was born on Dia de los muertos (Day of the Dead), a holiday that is celebrated in Latin America and in his neighborhood in New York City. In this stanza, he added more details about both celebrations.

I am from colored pencils on paper
 Letting the lead drag across the page
 Where the circles never end
 And take me far, far away.

I am a never-ending space,
 Blank but filled with millions of miles of mysteries
 Black holes leading deep into the dark past of my life
 To raging meteors that are ready to explode
 Yet I am a gentle gaze upon
 The stars, glittering like diamonds
 In this never-ending blackness.

To show readers that he is tough and soft at the same time, Christian contrasted more detailed images of black holes with the night sky and took his readers further into his mind—and his world.

I am what I am
 I am Christian Garcia
 Punk rocker to rap city gangster to writer/artist and world traveler.
 Take me far away from the city
 And take me to the rural streets of Managua, Nicaragua
 Take me to the grassy hilltops of ancient samurai battles
 Take me down the pleasant flow in the canals of Venice
 I am what I am and
 Most of all, I am me!

Christian evoked the place from which his family came and the places he dreams of visiting.



Your Turn: Write an "I am from" poem, and then pair up with a classmate to revise it.