

M3 / DIAGNOSE BEFORE POLISHING

Whole-Manuscript Revision Desk

Turn a full draft and reader feedback into a small, evidence-based revision plan.

For *Write Your First Memoir* by Adrian Reston. Use with Chapters 5 and 8–10, *When chapters repeat* and *Your revision letter*. This resource is for a draft with pages to inspect, even when those pages are incomplete.

Start with the manuscript you actually wrote

Reverse-map the draft before changing the original outline. For each chapter, name what a reader receives, the main scene or material and what becomes possible next. “Childhood” is a subject; “the reader sees why the workshop rule feels sensible” is a narrative job.

DO NOT REPAIR EVERYTHING AT ONCE

Choose the small set of changes that affects the whole book. Fix dependencies before sentence polish. Keep the passages that work and record why, so revision does not flatten them in the pursuit of consistency.

The fictional draft diagnosis

Mara’s first draft has six movements. Three repeatedly argue that keeping objects preserves connection. Her failed repair appears late, after the reader has already been asked to interpret Eli’s choices as impatience. The ending claims the workshop is no longer a problem, although the scenes show a smaller and less complete change.

The correct response is not “add more grief” or “write a happier ending.” Mara needs a different order, less repetitive explanation and an ending proportionate to the experience actually on the page.

Output

A reverse map, two or three priority changes with dependencies, a bounded request for outside reading, and a revision letter that explains the next pass. The editable file keeps decisions separate from a mechanical checklist of “done” boxes.

WORKED EXAMPLE / REVERSE MAP

Find the repeated job

Existing movement	What it currently does	Decision for the next draft
1. The drawer	Action followed by three versions of the same reflection.	Keep the handles entering the box; consolidate the repeated explanation.
2. First sort	Sets up the “useful” rule, then repeats the opening’s conclusion.	Keep setup; remove the conclusion the reader already has.
3. Eli’s box	Invites a verdict about Eli before complicating Mara’s rule.	Move after the failed repair; remove an unsupported statement of his motive.
4. Failed repair	Changes the meaning of keeping, but arrives after the key disagreement.	Move earlier so it changes how the next scene is read.
5. Donation visit	Repeats an argument; the actual choice is summarized.	Expand only the supportable decision; cut the repeated argument.
6. Return	Claims resolution larger than the observed action.	End on the one choice; let uncertainty remain where the book has not resolved it.

One causal repair, not six disconnected edits

Moving the failed repair changes the meaning of Eli’s box. That lets Mara remove explanation that previously tried to force the reader’s interpretation. Reordering and cutting therefore belong to one structural repair, not two unrelated productivity targets.

PRESERVE

Keep the practical question about which cupboard the handles fit. It does more narrative work than the paragraph telling us that the siblings approach loss differently.

WORKED EXAMPLE / READER FEEDBACK

Ask for observations you can use

A bounded request Mara can send

“Would you read these two chapters as a first-time reader? Please tell me where you lose the sequence, what you believe changes between the chapters, and which explanation feels repeated. Point to a passage when possible. I am not asking for line edits yet. Please keep the draft private. You can decline.”

Reader response	What Mara records	Action, not automatic obedience
“I cannot tell whether the failed repair happens before the box scene.”	Sequence confusion tied to a particular transition.	Add a clear time anchor and re-read the new order.
“Eli seems cruel. Explain that he is kind.”	The current pages invite a one-sided interpretation.	Inspect action and assigned motive; do not invent a balancing anecdote.
“You should finish with reconciliation.”	Preference for a resolved ending, not proof the current ending fails.	Test what the draft earns; keep an open ending if it is intelligible and proportionate.

Choose the right reader for the question

A family member may identify a date or a different recollection. A craft reader may identify where context is missing. Neither automatically settles the other question. Keep factual disagreement in the source record and craft observations in the revision record.

SHARING BOUNDARY

Use an appropriate, willing reader. Do not send sensitive material merely to complete this page. This companion does not determine rights, privacy obligations or legal clearance.

WORKED EXAMPLE / A USABLE LETTER

A revision plan with a stopping point

“This draft’s strongest material is the workshop action: the boxes, the handles and the practical decisions. I will preserve those passages and the places where the narrator admits uncertainty.

“First, I will move the failed repair ahead of Eli’s smaller box, then rewrite the transition so its time and relevance are clear. I will test the pair with a reader who has not seen the old sequence. They should be able to say what the repair changes without my explanation.

“Second, I will remove repeated reflection from the opening and first-sort chapter. I will keep the most specific version, not simply the shortest. I will check that the quieter scene still makes sense without my discarded explanation.

“Third, I will replace the ending’s claim of resolution with the narrower choice shown in the final scene. I will leave the family relationship open where the draft has no evidence of a conclusion. Sentence polish comes after these changes, not before.

“This pass ends when the revised order is understandable, each movement does different work and the ending is supported by the pages. It does not end when every reader likes every choice.”

A final pass has a different purpose

After structural repair, use Chapter 9 for sentence rhythm, names, tense and a small style sheet. Before sharing, separate unresolved factual markers, private details and deliberate uncertainty. A clean file is not the same as permission to publish it.

DONE FOR NOW

The next actions refer to real passages and an observable reader effect. You know what stays, what changes first and what you are deliberately not working on yet.