

Higher-Order and Lower-Order Concerns in Revising

THE WRITING CENTER
JUDITH G. GARDNER CENTER FOR WRITING EXCELLENCE



Revision involves a lot more than just fixing typos and misplaced commas. Before looking at anything on the sentence- or word-level (aka lower-order, or less important concerns), be sure to address the higher-order, more significant concerns first.

• Higher-Order Concerns •

Higher-Order Concerns (HOC) should be the priority during revision because they have the greatest impact on successful communication.

HOC 1: Assignment Fulfillment and Content

How well does the paper address the questions or parts of the assignment? Refer to the prompt/rubric to evaluate where/how/if the requirements of an assignment have been met.

Audience Awareness

How effectively does the content, explanation, organization, or tone address expectations of the target audience?

Genre Expectations

Does the writing fit with the expectations of the genre? Does a rhetorical analysis read like a rhetorical analysis, and not like a lit review? Does a scientific report include all the necessary sections?

HOC 2: Organization and Clarity

Main Idea and Supporting Points

Is the main idea or argument clear, coherent, and well-supported? How logically do the supporting points address the main topic, and how are examples used to support the main concept or argument? How effective are the examination of the topic, relevant research, and interpretations?

Thesis

Does the thesis communicate the main idea of the piece clearly and concisely? How relevant is the thesis to the needs of the assignment? How significant, arguable, and focused is the thesis? How does the thesis represent and interact with the rest of the paper?

Overall Organization

How effective and logical is the movement between ideas? Is each paragraph relevant to the thesis and main concept of the paper? In a long paper, are subsections used to help the reader digest complex ideas? Does each body paragraph or subsection focus on one relevant concept to support the thesis? Very long paragraphs should be broken into shorter ones that discuss one idea apiece.

HOC 3: Paragraph-Level Concerns

Analysis Quality

Are the examination of topic, relevant research, and interpretations valid, in-depth, and thorough?
Are there ways to add to and improve the analysis of subject matter and sources within a paper?

Expansion

If a paper is not long enough, how can it be expanded while staying relevant? Can the development and integration of research and evidence be strengthened? Does the evidence require more analysis and explanation? Are there other related points to add that will support the thesis? Would it be beneficial to include differing viewpoints or a counterargument?

Integration (and Credibility) of Sources

Are the sources credible and appropriate for the assignment? How well are sources integrated within the text? Is the information relevant to the thesis? Are quotes effectively introduced? Have they been fully explained?

Introduction

How well does the introduction identify the main point, provide necessary context or background information, and preview the essay?

Body Paragraphs

How are ideas developed within paragraphs? Does each body paragraph focus on one main idea? Is this idea clearly introduced and concluded with topic and concluding sentences? How strong are the analysis/synthesis and depth of explanations?

Conclusion

How strong is the conclusion, specifically looking at connections to the thesis/research question and discussion of broader implications?

● Lower-Order Concerns ●

Lower-Order Concerns (LOC) are focused on sentence and word level concerns and should be addressed after the HOC are taken care of.

LOC 1: Clear and Concise Writing

Concision

Does the paper employ the most efficient and effective language choices? Does the writing contain unnecessary words, ineffective repetition words/patterns, or passive constructions (according to genre conventions)?

Paragraph Transitions

Is there natural movement between paragraphs? Does each idea connect to the next one?

Sentence Structure

Is each sentence clear and easy to understand? Do long and confusing sentences need to be broken into shorter ones? Do choppy or repetitive sentences need to be combined? Are there any run-on sentences or sentence fragments?

Tone

Is the writing appropriately formal for what the assignment is? Are first- and second-person pronouns (I and you) acceptable? Are contractions (don't, can't) acceptable?

Word Choice and Phrasing

Unclear or confusing word choice should be revised so each idea comes through clearly.

LOC 2: Citations and Formatting

In-text Citations and Reference/Works Cited

Are in-text citations and the works cited/references section accurate? Is all external information credited appropriately?

Formatting

How well does the document conform to a specified style (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.)?

LOC 3: Grammar

Tense Consistency

Are verb tenses consistent and appropriate for the genre (present tense for literary analysis, past tense for history)? Are there unnecessary tense shifts?

Punctuation

Article Usage (a/an/the)

Prepositions and Prepositional Phrases