

Central Claim & Draft Revision

Taking inventory & sharpening initial arguments and writing.

Remember that your draft central claim or central claim is not untouchable. You can--and most likely should--revise it as you continue to work on your paper. Doing so reflects that your ideas have grown and developed during the writing process.

One way to sharpen your draft central claim is to question it--to ask questions about your ideas and the way you express them.

I. Take Inventory of Your Ideas

1. Copy your working central claim here. If your draft does not yet have one, sketch out a version:

2. Read the body of your essay; note the major ideas and examples here:

3. Look at what you wrote for 1 and 2. Do they "match"? That is, does your central claim reflect everything in the essay? Does your essay develop everything in the central claim? If not, decide if you need to revise the essay to match the central claim or revise the central claim to match the body. Jot down some notes to yourself about what you need to do:

If necessary, sketch out a revised version of your central claim:

4. If you have a draft conclusion, write down the version of your main idea presented there:

5. Compare the conclusion's version to your working central claim. Is one better (stronger, clearer, more specific) than the other? Revise the weaker version to match the stronger:

II. Sharpen Your Ideas

1. Question and challenge your ideas. Is the working central claim a statement of fact or an observation? If so, it needs to be revised. A central claim should take a clearly defined stand or position. It should make a claim that requires discussion, proof, and support. Revise the draft central claim to take a stand or make a claim:

2. An effective central claim makes a claim that is neither too broad nor too narrow. Sharpen your central claim by asking yourself questions like: Why are you taking this stand? What makes you feel this way? What do you want your readers to know or understand after reading your paper?

Use the answers to your sharpen and specify your central claim. Your central claim should convey your narrowed position on your topic as well as indicate some of the major reasoning behind it. In most cases it should include your major examples. Write your sharpened central claim here:

III. Sharpen Your Wording

1. Look for any vague, general, or “fuzzy” words. Circle all generic words like “people,” “things,” “you,” “everyone,” “society,” “different,” “similar,” “interesting,” etc. Substitute more specific words for the circled terms. Write the revised version here:

2. Underline the words that should be explained or clarified so readers understand your exact meaning. Revise the central claim to include any necessary clarification or explanation:

3. Next, look at your choice of verbs. Circle any linking verbs (is, was, has been, should be, etc.). Remember that linking verbs do just that--link; they don't argue, explain, or take a stand. See if

you can replace any linking verbs with action verbs:

4. Finally, look for any lingering broad or sweeping claims; these are usually too general to support effectively. Make the language of your central claim as specific and precise as possible.

At this point, you should have a sharpened and refined central claim. Keep in mind that you may need to revise the central claim even further before the final draft. You can run your central claim through some or all of these questions again at any point in the drafting and revision process.