

Revision Questions for Writers: In-Class Writing Workshop

Now that you have completed your draft, presumably last night, it is time for you to re-read your text not as the writer but as a reader. This is a challenging stance to adopt, but it is one you should attempt to take on. A guide for your work in reading as a reader, not a writer, is to ask yourself specific questions about the structure and organization of your essay. Here is just such a guide:

1. **Argument or Main Point.** Before even reading your essay take a minute to jot down what you think your argument or main point is. Write casually, as in, "I am arguing that school administrators need to better understand their students before making policies about safety that, though well intentioned, just make school seem like prison."

A. My argument:

B. Now, read the first two paragraphs and see if you can find that argument stated clearly. Usually it should be in the first paragraph, but that's not a hard-and-fast rule. Sometimes the first paragraph is used to get readers' attention and the second paragraph presents the argument to readers. In either case, as a reader you should find a sentence or possibly two in which an argument or main point is stated clearly. When you find the argument or main point, underline it. If you don't find it, make a notation on your paper as to where you are going to insert the argument you wrote earlier for this exercise.

2. **Support.** Have you supported your argument with evidence? For each claim you make, be sure that you have evidence that has been elaborated on and explained adequately.

A. Read through each of the points you make after the opening. Each of these points, sometimes a paragraph in length, sometimes longer (shorter isn't such a good idea--suggests the need for more development), should speak to your main argument or point. Is this the case? Yes/No. If no, write yourself a note here:

B. Write a few words of summary in the margin next to each point you've made to support your main claim. Do you have enough points? If not, make a note to yourself here:

C. Now, for each supporting point, have you provided evidence? Returning to the margin comments from 2.B., look within the body of your text for evidence, circling the phrases or sentences that provide the support needed for the secondary points that

make up the body of your essay. If you do not have sufficient evidence for some of your points, note that here:

3. Conclusion. Do you have one? Or have you trailed off? If you do have one, have you gone beyond summarizing the argument and the main supporting points? A simply summary is boring, and not worth reading. Instead you need to engage directly with readers, giving readers direction or inspiration for their own thinking. Stuck? Go back to the text and just read the last paragraphs of a few of the essays you read. Take inspiration from published writers! Make a note about the strengths and weaknesses of your conclusion here:

4. Paragraph structure. Now that you've read through your whole essay, you need to look at it again and make sure that your paragraphs are structured appropriately. Does each one contain a complete idea, and just one complete idea? Do they provide your reader with a chance for a quick break, a sip of water, perhaps? Imagine if a reader took a thirty-second break; would the subsequent paragraph begin in such a way so as to clue the reader in enough as to what it is that is being discussed? Make yourself a note here about problematic paragraphs:

5. Revision Plans. If you begin revising without a plan you'll just edit, fooling around with a few words here and there. You need to think bigger.

A. Freewrite for two minutes as to what you will attempt to do in your next draft:

B. Now, reviewing your notes from 1-4, make more concrete plans for revision.

Using both 5.A. and 5.B. you should be ready to make a major revision of your essay tonight. When all else fails, remember that sometimes it's hard to revise when you have your first draft right in front of you. Try using your notes from this workshop to start your essay again, on a fresh word-processing document. Getting away from your old words may help you write new ones. Good luck.