

THE HIERARCHY OF WRITING CONCERNS

- 1) Thesis/Focus: the topic is narrow enough for the constraints of the assignment; a thesis statement presents the author's position including what s/he would like to persuade the audience to think, feel, or do after reading the paper; the urgent problem, context, and background is thoroughly presented by building upon existing scholarly conversation; and, the target audience is identified or easily inferred.
- 2) Development of Ideas: the main ideas of the paper are clearly stated, the author provides sufficient support for the thesis using a chain of logical reasoning, statistics, a summary of relevant research, examples, definitions, details, analysis, sufficient explanation of the evidence provided, and how it connects to and supports the author's position.
- 3) Organization or Rhetorical Format: the paper is organized using a specific rhetorical format (problem/solution, cause/effect, classical argument, compare/contrast, narrative, etc.), the main ideas are presented in a way that logically flows (least to most important, chronological, general to specific, use of logical syllogisms, etc.), attending to the format preferred by the profession (APA style, literature review, policy paper, ethical decision making, SOAP note, etc.).
- 4) Internal Paragraph Organization and Transitions: Each paragraph contains only one idea, generally stated in the topic sentence, the main idea is supported with evidence and reasoning, the sentences are organized in service of the topic sentence, and transitions between paragraphs are used to move the argument forward.
- 5) Sentence Mechanics and Style: the writing is free of grammatical and spelling errors, the writing uses the appropriate citation style (APA, etc.), line editing has been used to improve clarity, concision, active voice, and style.

Teaching with the Hierarchy of Concerns

Hierarchy refers to the chronological order in which each of these elements should be addressed when helping writers revise, not the weight or degree of importance of each element.

To respond to the author, select **one or two** of these concerns, and respond to them in the order in which they are presented here as the essay requires. For example, if the essay presents 1) a solid thesis or focus, then respond to 2) development and 3) organization; however, if the essay does not present 1) a solid thesis or focus, then respond to 1) thesis or focus first.

This approach keeps your feedback focused without overwhelming the author. It helps the author understand where s/he is in the writing process and how much revision work remains ahead. It is efficient for the reader and the author because neither is spending time on lower level concerns like line editing before the main ideas are fully developed, organized, and revised.