



UNIVERSITY OF
**DETROIT
MERCY**

Higher-Order Concerns

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The Writing Center
DETROIT MERCY

What are Higher-Order Concerns?

In writing, higher-order concerns (also referred to as global considerations) are the most important areas of focus in a written project and are particularly important when you are revising it. Higher-order concerns involve how your thinking works in your writing; they are the most critical elements of your project that shape its meaning, structure, and effectiveness.

While not as important as higher-order concerns, lower-order concerns like grammar and spelling may also require immediate attention if their quality is so poor that they confuse the reader.

Where Might We Address Higher-Order Concerns?

Addressing higher-order concerns helps ensure that your ideas about your subject are clear, your argumentation and/or reasoning are effective, your project is organized and cohesive, and that is factually accurate. Higher-order concerns may be addressed and revised in the following places:

- ⇒ in the introduction/ thesis statement (i.e. your purpose)
- ⇒ in paragraphs (in their organization, ordering, and synthesis of ideas and source material)
- ⇒ in the use of evidence, including its quality, appropriateness, and integration
- ⇒ in your final words on the subject: the conclusion.

Higher Order-Concerns in the Introduction and Thesis Statement

Introductions and thesis statements provide the purpose and main idea of an essay or other written project. If a thesis statement is missing, readers may find the project confusing.

Thesis Statements

A strong thesis gives the essay a clear direction by making a specific, arguable claim.

Ask yourself:

- ⇒ Is my thesis making a claim someone could reasonably disagree with?
- ⇒ Is it specific enough to support within the length of my paper?
- ⇒ Does it avoid being too broad or too obvious?
- ⇒ Does every paragraph in the essay's body help prove my thesis or meet my purpose?

Revision Tip: If your essay wanders or includes unrelated points, revise your thesis or remove ideas that do not support it.

Introductions

An effective introduction prepares readers for your argument or writing project's purpose.

Make sure your introduction:

- ⇒ Introduces the topic and provides only the background readers need.
- ⇒ Clearly narrows the focus to your specific argument.
- ⇒ Ends with your thesis statement.

Revision Tip: After drafting your essay, return to the introduction to make sure it accurately reflects what your paper argues. Introductions may change as you revise your essay.

Evaluating Paragraphs for Organization, Flow, and Connectedness

Every paragraph should have a clear purpose in your essay. Body paragraphs should connect back to the thesis. As you evaluate your body paragraphs, ask yourself what role the paragraph plays in your overall essay. Ensure body paragraphs integrate and synthesize research.

Remember, your voice should be at the beginning and end of every body paragraph. Do not let the source material take over a paragraph.

Revision Tip: If a paragraph has no clear purpose—or appears in the wrong place—revise, move, or remove it.

Ensure Evidence Works in the Service of Your Writing

Use evidence that clearly supports your main idea. In personal or reflective writing, explain your own experiences with enough detail that readers can understand how they support your point.

- ⇒ In research-based writing, choose reliable, relevant sources, and when possible, use **primary sources** (original research or firsthand materials) rather than relying only on **secondary sources** (sources that summarize or interpret others' work).
- ⇒ Finally, explain how each piece of evidence connects to your argument, and cite all sources using the required style (MLA, APA, etc.).

Revision Tip: After each piece of evidence, ask yourself, "**How does this prove my point?**" If the connection is not obvious, add analysis that explains why the evidence matters and how it supports your thesis.

Conclusions

A strong conclusion does more than repeat your thesis. It reflects on what your discussion has shown, explains why your argument matters, and leaves the reader with a clear final insight. Briefly revisit your main idea considering the evidence and analysis you presented, rather than simply restating it.

Revision Tip: Ask yourself, "**So what?**" Make sure your conclusion explains the significance of your argument and gives readers a clear sense of why your ideas matter.

Why Start with Higher-Order Concerns?

Higher-order concerns shape the overall effectiveness of your paper. Revising your thesis, organization, evidence, and conclusions ensures your ideas are clear and well developed before you spend time polishing sentences or correcting grammar. Once the big-picture issues are resolved, editing lower-order concerns becomes easier, and more meaningful because you'll be refining a strong draft rather than perfecting one that still needs major revisions.

Sources: David Rosenwasser and Jill Stephens. Writing Analytically, with Readings 3rd ed., Purdue OWL's "Higher Order Concerns and Lower Order Concerns," and Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers, The Bedford Handbook 9th ed.