

## How to Judge Writing

The following guidelines for judging writing are not only useful for judging the writing of others, but also for understanding how to approach your own writing tasks.

**1. Higher Order Concerns (HOC):** These concerns are pervasive. They involve the essence and purpose of the piece, and as a rule they cannot be found at particular points on the page. Crucially, they must be improved by revision (i.e., re-seeing), not editing. Fixing problems in grammar, usage, and so on will have no beneficial effect on HOCs. The HOCs are as follows:

Focus: Is the piece about one main idea? Does it stay with this idea or wander off? Is the idea about the right size for the length of the piece, or is it too general to allow a detailed discussion? Is the focus relevant, useful?

Development: Does the piece present enough information so that the reader feels that the work is complete? Are there specific details that develop or support generalizations? Are uninformative summaries, mere assertions, and other vague subjectivity avoided?

Organization: Is there a plan for the piece? What is the reason for using this plan? Are the ideas presented in an order that makes sense, considering the purpose of the paper? Are paragraphs about one main idea? Is the reader introduced to the topic at the beginning and led to an ending that creates a sense of completeness or conclusion? Are the sections of the piece linked together by transitions?

Audience: For whom is this piece written? What sort of action or reaction does the writer expect from the audience? How much does the audience know, and what are/might they be interested in? What views or prejudices do they already hold, and how should these be reckoned with? Do the other HOCs reflect what the writer knows about the audience and his/her purpose?

**2. Lower Order Concerns (LOCs):** These are not called lower order because they are unimportant. In fact, getting these concerns wrong will often cause you as much trouble as neglecting HOCs. LOCs have their name for three reasons:

1. Writers must worry about them after they have gotten the HOCs into reasonable shape. Making significant editing changes before whole sections of the text are added, moved, or deleted during revision only wastes time, since the HOCs will have to be attended to anyway, and the writer will have to edit again for LOCs.

2. In general, LOCs have to do with the physical appearance of the paper, not with its content or purpose, which are much more complicated matters.

3. LOCs are fixed by editing, and by referring to rules, a much simpler business for writers than discovering what they are saying and how to say it. Writers should always deal with HOCs first. Examples of LOCs are as follows:

spelling	punctuation	subject-verb agreement
fragments	run-ons	comma splices
parallel structure	misplaced modifiers	dangling modifiers
pronoun agreement	pronoun reference	word choice
verb tense	sentence structure	manuscript form

