

OVERVIEW OF HIGHER ORDER CONCERNS

Global (Higher Order) Concerns are the first issues that writers must address in order to communicate an idea. They are:

1. Audience
2. Purpose
3. Thesis
4. Organization
5. Development
6. Introduction
7. Conclusion

Audience

Awareness of your audience affects your decisions about content, argument, style, and diction. Whenever possible, you should cater your paper to your specific audience to avoid any confusion that the reader may have about your intentions or meaning.

There are two types of audience:

1. Direct – Those to whom the text is directed
2. Indirect – Incidental readers

Focus on Direct Audience first

- What is their knowledge level?
- What is their experience level?
- Will they have the same view as you or a different one?

Write at the level of your reader. Educated readers expect in-depth content, complex arguments, and more developed diction (word choice). Less knowledgeable readers may require more explanations, illustrations, and clearer prose, perhaps with definitions.

Purpose

In academia, the reason for writing is usually either to inform, to demonstrate knowledge, or to argue a point.

Keep your purpose in mind. As you write your paragraphs, *develop* your purpose: make arguments, supply illustrations, and build connections.

Always ask:

- Does this serve my purpose?
- How does it serve my purpose?
- Will my audience see my purpose?

Deviating from your purpose puts you in danger of rambling or ranting. It will distract your reader from the real issue and point of your paper. Stay focused on the main thing that you want your reader to realize.

Thesis

This is an explicit, arguable statement that lays out the *purpose* and *organization* of the text. The thesis may be implied in literary works and stories, but in academic work, it's best to clearly state arguments and claims that fulfill purpose.

Make a thesis by either:

- Identifying specific points you will argue (as in a 5-paragraph essay)
- Creating a statement that includes your topic, purpose, and opinion, or
- Explaining your purpose following the patterns of organization (see Organization)

A thesis is *never* a question, though if you have a research question, the *answer* will be your thesis.

A thesis may be found:

- At the end of the introduction for nearly all academic writing
- At the beginning of the conclusion for topics which require a large amount of debate

- At the very end of narratives

If you can't come up with a thesis:

1. Freewrite about your topic. Write non-stop until you have absolutely nothing left to say.
2. Look at the conclusion; the thesis should be there as the first or last sentence.

WHY? Because story-telling (narrative) is the most natural form of writing, and the point of a story always comes at the end.

Organization

The Rhetorical Modes of Thought (verbal and written), also called the Patterns of Organization, are the tools for organizing everything. They are:

- Narration
- Description
- Comparison & Contrast
- Classification
- Division
- Illustration
- Cause & Effect
- Process
- Problem & Solution

Your organization will most often be based around one of the nine patterns listed above. However, organization should always take the audience into consideration.

Narrative is the oldest way of knowing and sharing ideas. Essentially, it is storytelling. The thesis comes at the end. Very little academic writing is pure narrative, though narratives are often embedded in essays.

Description is the use of the senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell. This allows the audience to place themselves in the setting and situation that is being described.

Comparison & Contrast shows how items are similar (compare) and different (contrast). Order of Importance is critical to this pattern. There are two types:

Horizontal (by quality)

Describe each quality as it relates to each item. Then go back and repeat.

Point 1
 First Item
 Second Item

Point 2
 First Item
 Second Item

Point 3
 First Item
 Second Item

Vertical (by item)

Describe all significant qualities of the first item, then all of the second, third

First Item
 Point 1
 Point 2
 Point 3

Second Item
 Point 1
 Point 2
 Point 3

Classification is taking a group of items and sorting them based on their characteristics. It's the basis for stereotyping (ex. classifying automobiles or classmates).

Division is breaking a single item into its separate parts (ex. parts of a computer, departments in a university, notes in a song).

Illustration is an example of a point, usually a specific or concrete example that the reader can connect with. Look for the words "for example" or "for instance" to set off an illustration.

Cause & Effect is a relationship between and among events. Look for keywords such as "because," "since," and "if...then." Depending on the complexity, each cause and each effect could be a paragraph,

or they could be grouped together. Like *compare & contrast*, order of importance is critical here. *Process* is the set of instructions or directions in which something is done. Look for ordinal numbers (first, second, third, etc.), or steps (first, next, later, finally, etc). Although not necessarily part of process, always consider the *order of importance* for presenting information using any of the patterns of organization.

Problem & Solution is similar to *cause & effect*, although causes and effects do not always result in problems or solutions. The keywords to look for, however, will likely be similar, although texts often state directly when something is a problem or a solution.

Always ask: what pattern will work best, or is there a standard practice for making a particular argument to your audience (ex. Problem and Solution for the scientific method).

Development

If *organization* arranges paragraphs, development is what happens within them. A well-developed academic paragraph has three parts:

1. Topic/Summary Sentence or Claim
2. Evidence
3. Discussion / Connections

The *topic/summary sentence or claim* is one step in your overall argument. This sentence usually comes at the beginning of a paragraph; however, it can go at the end.

Evidence is the proof for your claim. Types of evidence include:

- summarized, paraphrased, or quoted second-hand sources (library or web research)
- primary research (interviews or surveys)
- narratives or anecdotes
- charts, graphs, images

Your *discussion* or *connection* explains to the reader how the *evidence* ties to the *topic* and *thesis*. Remember, no matter how educated, NO reader knows exactly how you're analyzing or connecting these parts together. Your discussion should thoroughly explain your thought process and make connections.

When an essay or paragraph is too long or too short, the problem is usually with development.

Introduction & Conclusion*

These are the bookends of the essay; they work together and shape each other. Consider writing them in pairs, using these or other strategies:

- Tell a story up to the climactic moment (Introduction), then finish it and discuss its relevance (Conclusion).
- Provide surprising facts or data (Introduction), then return to them and discuss their relevance (Conclusion).
- Ask difficult or thought provoking questions (Introduction) then return to them, maybe even answer them (Conclusion).
- Scientific Method – Pose the *problem*, ask the research question, and give the *thesis* (Introduction), then restate the problem and offer *solutions* and recommendations (Conclusion).
- Try dividing the *Patterns of Organization* (*effects* in the Introduction, *causes* in the Conclusion, or show how something defies *classification*).

*not original Global Concerns, but merit attention.

Sources Consulted

McAndrew, Donald.A. and Thomas J. Reigstad. *Tutoring Writing: A Practical Guide for Conferencers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann-Boynnton-Cook, 2001.