

**Writing levels** are a way to see a text in different ways in order to improve it.

A text is composed like a symphony: there are many parts. The ideas might be called the melody, but that melody is delivered with many different notes. The notes involved in writing are words and punctuation. We structure our movements in paragraphs. We return to the thesis like a chorus. Songs have tempo and tuning, but texts have grammar.

In order to orchestrate the piece, we writers need to understand all the parts. We organise the parts into these writing levels. We're going to use four levels: **word**, **sentence**, **paragraph**, and **essay** (or idea). Use our structure as a system for revising your texts. Here are our concerns for each level:

## Word Level

- Are there no unnecessarily large words or redundant small ones?
- Are complicated words explained well?
- Is the spelling accurate?
- Are the verbs distinct and interesting?
  - Tip: avoid overly relying on *is, was, were, been, has, have, had*
- Is the grammar not distracting from the ideas?

## Sentence Level

- If a sentence is long, does it need to be?
- Is there variation in length and structure of sentences?
- Do too many sentences begin with the same word?
- Is correct punctuation used?
  - Tip: as a rule, commas are safest. Dashes, colons, and semi-colons are trickier.
  - Tip: know where your discipline stands on the Oxford comma.

## Paragraph Level

- Does the introduction clarify the argument and map out the text's main points?
- Does each paragraph have a structure?
  - Tip: this is the most common paragraph structure
    - Topic sentence: introduce the main point of the paragraph
    - Introduce evidence: quote, statistic, concept

- Discuss evidence: your take on it
- Transition: set up the next paragraph's topic
- Does each paragraph have a single focus?
  - Tip: if not: refine or separate.
- Do the paragraph topics flow in a logical order to arrive at the final understanding?

### **Essay Level**

- Does my text respond to the task assigned?
- Is the focus of the paper specific enough?
- Are arguments framed in a way that addresses the audience's concerns?
- Are all the references correctly formatted?
- Are margins and headings all formatted correctly?
- Is the word count sufficient?

### **How to use**

As you are reading through your own work, do a targeted reading where you only look for one level of improvement at a time. If you're trying to address all these concerns at the same time, then you're bound to freak out and rage quit. So, choose a level of revision and then methodically read for flaws only on specific concerns. Answers to the questions should come partly from your supervisors and partly from your own preferences. Good writing involves making a lot of decisions. Make informed decisions wherever possible. Ask your supervisor specific questions about ideas, audience, purpose. Decide for yourself about style, structure.