

Using written feedback when revising



In what ways do Writing Center consultants provide feedback to writers?

At the University Writing Center we prefer to work with people through face-to-face or live video chat consultations that allow us to have a conversation about writing. Yet we recognize that some writers are only able to submit work for written feedback. What's more, much of the feedback writers receive in other contexts comes in the form of written comments. This guide offers a strategy for navigating written comments and making substantial revisions.

One of the primary differences between a face-to-face or live video chat consultation and a written feedback consultation is that the written feedback consultations lack the conversational aspect that allows both the writer and consultant to ask questions, discuss options, or respond immediately. In a written feedback session, the consultant responds with two primary goals in mind. The consultant addresses what she regards as the most significant concerns and questions first and in the most detail, even if this means that she cannot address every concern in one 50-minute appointment. Also, the consultant's written comments are intended not only to help the writer improve one particular draft but also offer suggestions and strategies that will help the writer with future writing projects.

What types of feedback do Writing Center consultants give writers?

When a writer reads the written feedback on a draft, he may notice the consultant has made a wide range of comments regarding a number of different issues. Writers are sometimes unsure where to begin in using written feedback to revise a draft. One way to approach revision, no matter what the situation, is to organize feedback into three levels of concern.

- **Essay-Level Concerns** include questions regarding the overall focus of the piece, how well it completes its intended purpose, or its organization as a whole. This level also includes the need to generate large amounts of new content to fill gaps, explain complicated points, shore up your argument, or fulfill genre expectations (like having a literature review for an academic paper).

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What types of feedback do Writing Center consultants give writers? (cont.)

- **Paragraph-Level Concerns** address the order of paragraphs as well the organization of the information within paragraphs. Other concerns at this level include elaborating on specific points, providing additional details, giving a summary of a source, or expanding on an idea. At this level, you might also rearrange the sentences within a paragraph or create transitions between paragraphs for easier comprehension.
- **Sentence-Level Concerns** include questions of grammar and style as well as citation issues.

How do I use written feedback when I start revising?

In general, essay-level concerns take the most time and energy to address during the revision process and sentence level concerns take the least. For this reason, it's easy to focus first on the sentence-level issues and neglect paragraph-level and essay-level concerns. However, making those essay-level and paragraph-level revisions will result in the most substantial revision of your work overall, creating a stronger focus and organization, rather than just a more grammatically correct one. Additionally, sometimes essay-level revisions also address feedback about sentence-level concerns; you might find that you need to get rid of a whole paragraph, so why go through the work of revising it at the sentence level?

Final tips for using written feedback.

- Identify the essay-level concerns first. Usually, your consultant will include comments on these areas in the longer note at the beginning of your draft. Also, the consultant will usually list what she considers most important first, which can be helpful as you plan your revisions.
- Next, identify which paragraph-level concerns are still relevant to your newly revised draft. Your consultant will usually use marginal comments at the beginning or end of a paragraph to address these issues.
- Tackle the sentence-level concerns last. Usually, these will be marked with marginal comments, but if the consultant notices a particular tendency in your writing (if you have a habit of forgetting to add the year in your APA citations, for example, or often misuse semicolons), she might note that in the head note.

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Final tips for using writing feedback (cont.).

- Check out any included links to University Writing Center resources, such as our Common Writing Situations or handouts and videos, that can help you address these concerns.
- Remember that Written Feedback appointments, like all University Writing Center appointments, are 50 minutes long and the consultant may not have time to address every concern in a draft within that appointment time. Pay attention to the kinds of suggestions the consultant has noted and then look at your entire draft with those ideas in mind, not only the places noted by the consultant.
- If you still have questions or concerns after revising, you can resubmit a piece to the Virtual Writing Center (you can make up to two appointments a week). If possible, make an appointment with the same consultant, as she will already be familiar with the piece and can give feedback on your revisions that takes the previous draft into consideration.