

11.007 Resolving Public Disputes:
Editing Worksheet
Spring 2005

Please fill in the following worksheet for the essay you are editing. While it is important to identify the strengths of the essay, it is also essential that you suggest places where and ways in which the author can improve it. Do not be afraid to suggest major changes if you perceive a serious flaw in the essay (such as key points missing, an unclear or nonexistent argument, illogical organization).

Begin by reading the essay through once (you can mark things in pencil that jump out at you). Then, go back to the beginning and proceed through the essay, doing the following:

MAJOR CONCERNS

Title. Does the author's title make sense? Does it convey the main point of the essay?

--Suggest changes.

Argument. Identify and mark the author's argument in the essay [ARG]. Is the argument stated clearly and concretely at the beginning of the essay? Is there any way the author could improve the argument (e.g., by changing vague words to more concrete words, by making his/her point more simply)?

--Suggest improvements. (Even better, paraphrase the author's argument below, in your own words.)

Organization. Identify and mark the author's supporting points [PUT CIRCLED NUMBERS NEXT TO EACH POINT]. Does the author's argument proceed in a logical way? Is each point linked to the previous one? Is each point obviously linked to the larger argument of the essay? (Hints: Each paragraph should make one main point; the remainder of the paragraph should support that point. Ideally, the author states the paragraph's main point in the first sentence.)

--If the author's argument does not seem to proceed logically, suggest an alternative organization. If the author seems to have missed a key point or key points, suggest what those are. Identify any extraneous—or not obviously relevant—points the author makes.

Evidence. Mark the evidence the author uses to support her/his claims [EVIDENCE]. Does the author make claims (s)he does not support with evidence but could have? Does (s)he rest claims on evidence that is not persuasive (e.g., incomplete, clearly biased, poorly documented)?

--Suggest the kinds of evidence the author might have used.

Rebuttal. If the author rebuts the strongest counter-argument, mark that rebuttal [REBUT]. Has the author really chosen the strongest counter-argument, or has (s)he taken on a straw man argument? Has (s)he effectively rebutted the counter-argument?

Conclusion. Mark the author's conclusion [CONC]. Is the conclusion provocative—that is, does it raise at least one thought-provoking implication of the essay's main argument? Or does the conclusion merely restate the main argument of the essay?

--Suggest a direction the author might take in thinking of a more provocative conclusion.

STYLE POINTS

Editing. If you have time, identify any of the following, using editing marks:

Repetition/redundancy (“R”); wordiness (“W”), vague language (“vague”), inappropriate word choice (“wc”); awkward phrase (“awk”), spelling error (“sp”), jargon (circle the word and suggest a simpler one), passive voice (“passive”).

Finally, don't forget to tell the author what you like about the essay. Write a summary of your comments on the back of his/her essay, and provide your name and email address so (s)he can contact you with questions.