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Revising: Improve Your Problem-Solution Analysis

DIRECTIONS Use this chart to help you improve your problem-solution analysis.

QUESTIONS	DO THIS	CHANGES YOU MADE
1. Does the introduction grab the reader's attention?	<input type="checkbox"/> Circle any sentence in the introduction that grabs the readers' attention.	
2. Does the thesis statement identify the problem and hint at a solution?	<input type="checkbox"/> Underline the thesis statement. <input type="checkbox"/> Double-underline the hint at the solution.	
3. Does the analysis provide a clear and complete explanation of the problem?	<input type="checkbox"/> Highlight the sentence or sentences that show the analysis of the problem.	
4. Does the analysis address any counterclaims that readers may have?	<input type="checkbox"/> Bracket the sentence that addresses a counterclaim.	
5. Does the analysis present the best solution and provide reasons and evidence to support it?	<input type="checkbox"/> Put a star beside the best solution. <input type="checkbox"/> Draw arrow brackets around the reasons and supporting evidence.	
6. Does the conclusion restate the thesis and contain a call to action?	<input type="checkbox"/> Label in the margin the sentence that restates the thesis of the analysis. <input type="checkbox"/> Put a check beside the call to action.	
7. Does the analysis include clichés?	<input type="checkbox"/> Draw a wavy line under any phrases that sound familiar. Revise any underlined phrases.	

Examining a tentative solution

Look at your analysis of the problem and think about your personal experience with it. Your analysis of the problem will probably lead you to possible solutions. If no solution is apparent, try the following creative problem-solving procedures.

Solving the problem. Creative problem solving generally involves looking at the problem in new ways. These activities should get you started. Write for around five minutes pursuing each possibility.

Solve one small aspect of the problem.

Find out how a comparable problem has been solved.

Develop a solution that eliminates one or more of the problem's causes.

Think of another way to categorize the problem.

Envision the problem in another medium or context.

Consider how another person you respect (someone you know personally or a historical or fictional figure) might solve the problem.

If you cannot think of an original solution, investigate ones that others have proposed. At some point, you will need to consider alternative solutions anyway and how they compare to your own. Remember that your solution does not have to be original, but it should be one you feel strongly about. Solving problems takes time. Often the most imaginative solutions come only after we have struggled and given up. Be sure to give yourself enough time to let your ideas percolate.

Choosing the most promising solution. In a sentence or two state what you would consider the best possible way of solving the problem.

Listing specific steps. Write down each of the steps necessary to implement your solution.

Now you should examine the problem and solution you have selected to see whether they will result in a strong proposal. For guidance, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this a significant problem? Do other people in the group really care about it, or can they be persuaded to care?
- Is my solution feasible? Will it really solve the problem? Can it be implemented?

Testing your choice

Identify your readers

As you plan and draft your proposal, you will probably want to consider these questions again and again. If at any point you decide that you cannot answer them affirmatively and confidently, you may want to choose a different problem to write about or find another solution.

You must decide whom you wish to address—everyone in the group, a committee, an individual, someone outside the group. Write down a few sentences describing your readers and stating your reason for directing your proposal to them.

Profiling your readers. Take ten minutes to write about your readers.

Use these questions to stimulate your writing:

- How informed are they likely to be about the problem? Have they shown any awareness of it?
- Why would this problem be important to them? Why would they care about solving it?
- Have they offered or supported any proposals to solve the problem? If so, what do their proposals have in common with my proposal?
- Do they ally themselves with any particular group or philosophy that might cause them to favor or reject my proposal? Do we all share any values or attitudes that I could use as a bridge to bring us together to solve the problem?
- How have they responded to other problems? Can I infer anything from their reactions in the past that would suggest how they may respond to my proposal?

Talking with a reader. Imagine one reader, someone who would question your assessment of the problem or your tentative solution. If you have someone particular in mind, name that person. Try to imagine how he or she would react to your proposal. Write out a dialogue between the two of you, setting it up as Wendy Jo Niwa does (see the Writer at Work section at the end of this chapter). Imagine that there is some disagreement about your proposal—that is, assume you are forced to respond to questions or objections.

Take a minute to focus your thoughts. In two or three sentences, restate the problem and your proposed solution.

Proposals have to be feasible—that is, they must be both reasonable and practical. Imagine that one of your readers opposes your proposed solution and confronts you with each of the following statements. Write several sentences refuting each one.

- It won't really solve the problem.
- We can't afford it.

Defend your solution

Your readers

- What do my readers already know about this problem?
- Are they likely to welcome my solution or resist it?
- Can I anticipate any specific reservations or objections they may have?
- How can I gain readers' enthusiastic support? How can I get them to help me implement the solution?
- What kind of tone would be most appropriate? How can I present myself so that I seem both reasonable and authoritative?

The beginning

- How can I begin so as to immediately engage my readers' interest? Shall I open with a personal anecdote or a dramatic one? Shall I begin by stating something surprising, as Bly does? Or should I open my proposal as Niwa does, by commenting on something positive before announcing the problem?
- What information should I give first?

Defining the problem

- Is this a problem people know about, or is it relatively unknown?
- How much do I need to say about its causes or history?
- How can I establish the seriousness of the problem?
- Is it an urgent problem? How can I emphasize this?
- How much space should I devote to defining the problem?

Proposing a solution

- How should I state my thesis? When should I announce it explicitly?
- How can I make the solution seem easy to implement? Can I present the first step so that it looks easy to take?
- How can I present my solution so that it looks like the best way to proceed?

Rejecting alternative solutions

- How many alternative solutions should I mention? Which ones should I discuss?
- Should I indicate where these alternatives come from? Should I name those who proposed them?

- How can I reject these other solutions without seeming to criticize their proponents?
- What reasons should I give for rejecting the alternative solutions? Can I offer any evidence in support of my reasons?

Refuting counterarguments

- Should I mention every possible counterargument to my proposed solution? How might I choose among them?
- Has anyone already proposed these counterarguments? If so, should I name the person in my proposal?
- How can I refute the counterarguments without criticizing anyone?
- What specific reasons can I give for refuting each counterargument? How can I support these reasons?

Avoiding logical fallacies

- Will I be committing an *either/or* fallacy by presenting my solution as the only possible solution: either mine or nothing? Can I ignore any of the likely alternative solutions?
- Can I present other proposed solutions in such a way that they are easily rejected without being accused of building a *straw man*? (A straw man is easy to push over.)
- How can I show my readers that I have *accepted the burden of proof*? Can I make a comprehensive argument for my proposed solution? Will readers feel that it is one they should accept?
- If I discuss the causes of the problem, can I avoid the fallacy of *oversimplified cause*? Have I identified significant causes, or are some of them minor contributing causes? Have I accounted for all of the major causes?
- How can I argue reasonably against other possible solutions? Can I criticize other proposals without attacking the people involved and thus committing the *ad hominem* (Latin for "to the man") fallacy?

The ending

- How should the proposal end? Shall I end with a practical plan, as Bly does? Or should I simply end by summarizing my solution and restating its advantages?
- Is there something special about the problem itself I should remind readers of at the end?
- Should I end with an inspiring call to action or a scenario suggesting the dreaded consequences of a failure to solve the problem?
- Would a shift to humor or satire be an effective way to end?

- Draw a wavy line under any words or images that sound *hate-stale*, or vague. Also put the wavy line under any words or phrases that you consider unnecessary or repetitious.
- Look for pairs or groups of sentences that you think should be combined. Put brackets [] around these sentences.
- Look for sentences that are garbled, overloaded, or awkward. Put parentheses () around these sentences. Parenthesize any sentence that seems even slightly questionable; don't worry now about whether or not it is actually incorrect. The writer needs to know that you, as one reader, had even the slightest hesitation about reading a sentence, even on first reading.

Analysis
The following questions will help you analyze the parts of the proposal and evaluate their effectiveness.

1. Evaluate the definition of the problem. Has the writer given enough information about its causes and consequences? Tell the writer if there is anything more you wish to know about the problem.
2. Restate in your own words the proposed solution. Is it clear? Look at the reasons in support of this solution—are they sufficient? Which are the most convincing reasons offered? Which are the least convincing ones? Why?
3. Look closely at the steps for implementing the proposal. Do they tell you everything you need to know? If not, ask specific questions to let the writer see what additional information a reader needs to know. Does the solution seem practical? If not, why not?
4. Consider the treatment of objections or counterarguments to the proposed solution. Point out any other counterarguments the writer may have missed. Cite the reasons and evidence refuting counterarguments that you found the most convincing. Indicate also which was the least convincing, and why.
5. Does the writer discuss any alternative solutions? If not, should any be mentioned? If any are mentioned, does the writer argue against them effectively? What are the most convincing reasons given against these other solutions? Which are least convincing, and why?
6. Consider the balance. Are the key features treated adequately and fairly? Or is there too much of one thing and too little of another? Perhaps there is too much attention given to alternative solutions, too little to counterarguments. Point out any elements that need more or less emphasis, and explain why.
7. Evaluate the beginning. Is it at all engaging? Did it capture your attention? Does it forecast the main ideas and alert the reader to the plan of the proposal? Should it? See if you can suggest other ways to begin.
8. Evaluate the ending. Does it frame the proposal? If not, how might it do so? Can you suggest a stronger conclusion?
9. Describe the tone of the proposal. Does it seem appropriate for its readers? Is it consistent from beginning to end? Point out any inconsistencies.
10. What final comments or suggestions can you offer to the writer? What is the strongest part of this proposal? What most needs additional work?

Revising a proposal

You are now ready to revise your draft. Before considering the following specific suggestions for revising a proposal, you might want to refer to the plan for revising described in Chapter 11. Follow this revising plan until you reach the section *Read Again To Identify Problems*. At this point, you can substitute these specific suggestions for the general ones in Chapter 11.

Consider any advice you may have from other readers as you reread your draft and make plans for revision. If you can, you might have someone else read the draft to help you solve any particularly difficult problems. For example, if you are having trouble refuting one alternative solution, you might see if someone else can help.

Look now at the following tips on revising proposals.

Revising to strengthen the argument

- Reconsider your definition of the problem. Is it complete, or would it be stronger with more information? Should you add anything about its causes or potential dangers? Have you articulated its seriousness?
- Scrutinize your solution as closely as possible. Have you shown it to be both feasible and superior to all other possible solutions?
- Reread your argument with your readers in mind. Have you fully considered their experience and expectations, fears and biases? Think of all the factions within the group—does your argument appeal to them all? Should it?
- Look carefully at each part of your argument. Could you strengthen your proposal by rearranging these parts?

Revising for readability

- Are there any places where you tell readers more than they need to know? Less than they need to know?
- Reconsider your beginning. Would another beginning engage readers more quickly?
- Reconsider your ending. Does the proposal end gracefully and emphatically? Is the ending likely to appeal to your readers? Does it emphasize what you want it to?
- Look carefully at each sentence. Does it say what you want it to say? Does it repeat something said in the previous sentence? Does it state the obvious?
- Improve the flow of your writing by strengthening connections between sentences and paragraphs. See whether any sentences should be combined or separated into two sentences.

Editing and proofreading

As you revise a draft for the final time, you need to edit it closely. Though you probably corrected obvious errors in the drafting stage, usage and style were not your first priority. Now, however, you must find and correct any errors of mechanics, usage, punctuation, or style. After you have edited the draft and produced the final copy, be sure to proofread carefully before turning in your essay.