

Writing Priorities: Exploring Lower and Higher Order Concerns

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Defining Lower Order and Higher Order Concerns

Lower Order Concerns

Pertain to smaller, stylistic concerns of a paper

- ◇ Word choice
- ◇ Punctuation
- ◇ Spelling
- ◇ Sentence Structure

Higher Order Concerns

Pertain to larger, structural concerns of a paper

- ◇ Thesis/Purpose
- ◇ Organization of the paper
- ◇ Developing ideas and showcasing evidence

Information acquired from Purdue Owl

Mariah's Experience as a Chemistry Tutor

- Students come in frustrated
- There is a correct and instant answer—lower order concern
- Students are used to finding the answer, then leaving it be



Mariah's Experience as a Writing Tutor and English Major

- The lower order concerns attitude carries over into writing
- Students want help with lower order concerns more
- Students may expect an instant answer for the higher order concerns





The challenge of any writing center—as for any classroom teacher—is to help students move beyond surface concerns, and beyond satisfying the instructor’s explicitly stated demands, to an understanding of the content and the student’s own relationship to it (Robinson 71).

Prioritizing Higher Order Concerns

- Organizes the “bigger picture” ideas a student has
- Allows them to get a clear direction of where to go from there
- Allows them to focus on the writing prompt, or guidelines
- Encourages them to be confident about their ideas



Prioritizing Lower Order Concerns Part 1

- Certain situations call for a more indepth focus on sentence-structure issues.
- ESL (English as a Second Language) students
 - Already mastered planning/thinking process
 - Know where they want to go
 - Struggle with putting these idea into words



Prioritizing Lower Order Concerns Part 2

- English Language is HARD!
- Easy to mix-up rules, or forget them altogether
- This begins a pattern of uncertainty that will only weaken a student's process



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Through an understanding of grammar, as opposed to rote memorization of forms, students can begin to see the connections between grammatical choice and audience, and, more important, they can begin to understand what these choices say about themselves as writers and as human beings (Glover and Stay).

Regan's Experience as an English Major and Writing Tutor

- Parallels to Mariah's point (Right and Wrong)
- If a student does not grasp the concept of simple sentence structure, or correct grammar, they may think their writing is “wrong”
- Should not be viewed in this way
- Every student has their own strengths and weaknesses (Every session is different)
- In reality, writing is a process, and needs developed over time.



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Learning to write well through a better understanding of grammar means addressing the growth and development of the whole person, since writing is a way of coming to know—the self, others, and the world (Glover and Stay 130).

Works Cited

- ◇ Presentation template by SlidesCarniva
- ◇ “Higher Order Concerns (HOCs) and Lower Order Concerns (LOCs).” *Purdue Owl*
- ◇ Robinson, Heather M. “Writing Center Philosophy and the End of Basic Writing: Motivation at the Site of Remediation and Discovery.” *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2009, pp. 70-92.

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Works Cited

“Grammar in the Writing Center: Opportunities for Discovery and Change” By: Carl W. Glover and Byron L. Stay