

### Addressing Higher-Order Concerns

Address **higher-order concerns** first. Higher-order concerns are the big issues in the paper, ones that aren't addressed by proofreading or editing for grammar and word choice. When addressing higher-order concerns, it may help to consider the following questions:

- Is the writer really addressing the assignment and fulfilling its terms?
- Is there a need for a thesis, and if so, is there one?
- Do arguments have the support they need? Is there an organization I can relate to as a reader? Is this piece addressing an audience in an effective way?
- Does the piece show appropriate levels of critical thinking?

In addressing higher-order concerns, a responder is more than an editor. You are a reader. By responding as a member of the audience, you are a teacher. In an essay on reader response, Stephen North points, "...the object is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their text, are what get changed...[O]ur job is to produce better writers, not better writing" (438). In order to achieve this goal, it can be helpful to use questions rather than directions. While asking questions, consider

- Avoiding yes or no questions;
- Asking questions when you really want to know the answers, as an audience member; and
- Using content clarifying questions ("What does this term mean?" "What is this paragraph's function?").

Sometimes questions are not the best route, and directness can be useful.

- If you see a major concern early on, like the paper is not fulfilling the requirements of the assignment, you could always say, "I am concerned about the way your paper addresses the assignment because..." and give specific reasons why. This kind of statement can show the writer honest respect.
- Addressing pressing problems can help to move the writer forward.