SPA 189
Professor Schwartz
Procedure for effective editing

For Peer Critique-- Before your initial read-through:

I.   Sit down with your peer review partner. Discuss her goals and deficits
   a.   What kind of feedback has she received from professors or other audiences in the past?
   b.   What has she been asked to address and improve?
   c.   Does she notice deficits or challenges in her writing process or work product?
   d.   What goals does she have for her writing?
   e.   What does she understand about this assignment (read the assignment too)?

II.   Familiarize yourself with your peer review partner's thesis
   a.   You need to understand what s/he's trying to accomplish
   b.   You need to judge the paper against that standard
        i.   Is the thesis provable?
             1.   Provable: A constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United would not eliminate all corporate influence on state legislators.
             2.   Not provable: Raskin's proposal to amend the Constitution is ridiculous.
        ii. Clear?
III.   Proceed to editing steps below.

Self- or peer- editing steps: You will read through the paper at least three times. Your first reading will address the big picture; your second will dig deeper into evidence and structure; your third will address sentence-level and cosmetic issues.

First read-through: do not mark up the paper during this read-through.

IV.   Big picture
   a.   Thesis
        i.   Provable?
        ii. Objective standard?
        iii. Answers the assignment?

   b.   Fulfills the assignment's requirements
        i.   Required subject matter addressed
        ii. Includes all required elements
        iii. Cites relevant sources (for research papers)
        iv. Page length/ word count within assignment parameters
   c.   The "so what factor"
        i.   Does the writer clearly articulate why she is arguing her point/ would the reader understand why he should read this paper?

ii.   Does the author attempt to connect the topic to something that matters to the audience or contributes to a discussion of this topic?

iii.   Does the paper get a reader more interested in the idea than she was at the outset?

d.   The author's specific issues for improvement

After the first read-through: write a big picture note at the top of the paper describing what you find. Use a distinctive font and text color (not red).

If self-editing—take a quick break from your work and your computer. Breathe fresh air.

Second read-through: During this read-through, use the comments function (in the Review menu) in Word to point out issues with the argument structure, clarity of the sub-arguments, supporting evidence, and sign posts. Do not focus on or write comments on sentence-level issues at this time.

V.   Structure and support

i.   Clear statement of your thesis

ii.   Clear sub-theses/ supporting arguments

iii.   Sign posts alerting reader to why a paragraph or section exists / connecting text to prior points, thesis, and/or supporting arguments. Examples: "Justice Souter *also* fails to articulate a line between flexibility and fabrication." "*Second*, the Framers explicitly warned against unfettered executive power." "*Not only* does Raskin fail to distinguish between national power players and local interests, he *also* neglects to discuss the impact of local events—a notorious murder, a judge's extramarital affair—on voters' decisions."

b.   The "so what" factor—small picture

i.   Is the relationship between the sub-arguments and the main thesis clear?

ii.   Do you know why you are reading a given paragraph, fact, or point? Example of constructive peer critique: "You introduce Federalist #10. How does that relate to your thesis?"

c.   Adequate proof/support

i.   Are the sources credible? Are there problems with them?

ii.   Do the sources support the points for which you're citing them?

iii.   Is each assertion adequately supported?

iv.   Are there conclusory or editorial statements for which no objective support would be sufficient (e.g., "apples aren't as delicious as pears").

If self-editing: take a break. Go for a walk.

Third read-through. Focus on prose including sentence-level structural issues, coded language, superfluous verbiage. Add your margin comments on these issues to the other comments (you will do

all of this on one draft). Note—this is not proofreading. If there are spelling errors, note them but don't correct them. Do not edit the paper. Identify concerns. Note to writers: for peer review there shouldn't be spelling errors because you respect your peer review partner too much to make him function as a human spell checker, amiright?

> VI.   Prose
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>> v.   Identify <mark>and highlight</mark> coded language, i.e., terms whose meanings are not apparent (<mark>"existential minimalism"</mark>) and that require explanation the author hasn't provided.
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>> vi.   Sentence length—spot long sentences and eyeball for run-ons
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>> vii.   Passive voice
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>> viii.   Prepositional phrases
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>> ix.   Subject-verb agreement
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>> x.   Superfluous language. Identify passages—from words to paragraphs—that look like they are unneeded. In the case of longer passages, *ask* your partner why they are there.
>>
>> xi.   Paragraph length. If a paragraph is particularly long, highlight the whole thing and note in a margin comment.

After the third read-through: write additional big-picture comments at the end of the text (in a distinctive color—not red). What general tendencies did you see? Lots of passive voice? Was the paper stronger at the beginning and ramble toward the end? Were paragraphs generally too long? Did the author frequently omit evidentiary support?

> <u>If self-editing</u>: Ideally, sleep on it. Take at least a few hours to regroup.

Thank your peer review partner!