BE YOUR OWN CONSULTANT:
BIG PICTURE CHECKLIST

The goal of this handout is to provide you with some helpful techniques that you can use to address some common higher-order issues in your writing. All of the handouts mentioned below are available in our center and on the “Student Resources” section of our website.

TIPS FOR PUSHING IDEAS

• **Prompt Checklist** – Use the “Tips for Reading a Prompt” handout to create a checklist to ensure that you’re meeting all of the requirements provided by your professor.

• **Argument Analysis** – Use the “Tips for Analyzing Your Argument” handout to identify what type(s) of argument(s) you are making. Are you covering all of the key components of that argument type?

• **BEAM Evidence Check** – Use the “Considering Source Types” handout to identify the different types of sources you’re calling on in your arguments. Are any left out? Could any be expanded?

• **Connection Map** – Make a “mind map” of your main topics or ideas, and then list all the possible ways in which they might intersect or overlap.

TIPS FOR WORKING ON THESIS

**Quick Check:**

• **ID/Rephrase** – Underline your thesis. Try to restate it another way.

• **Check your conclusion** – Often a restated, refined version of the thesis will appear there.

• **SASSI Checklist** – Use the “Tips for a Strong Thesis Statement” handout to check your thesis statement.

**Tools for Improving Thesis:**

• **“They Say, I Say”** - This simple template gets to the heart of most academic discourse. Paraphrase what “they say,” (the common knowledge, or the theory that you’ll be arguing against) then what “I say,” (your thesis). Consider how the thesis builds on current understandings, addresses a gap in scholarship, or corrects a misunderstanding.

• **Reverse Engineering** – Developed by the Rutgers writing center, this is also known as the “pyramid method.” It takes a while, but can be effective when you have a well-developed paper but no clear thesis. Write out the topic sentences of each paragraph. Then draw connections between pairs of topics. Then draw connections between those pairs. And so on, until you reach a thesis.
TIPS FOR ADDRESSING PAPER ORGANIZATION

Tools for Redirecting Focus:

- **Blueprinting** – Without looking at the paper, consider about how much space should be devoted to each idea (in words, or fractions of a page). Create a paper “blueprint.” Then compare your “blueprint” with your draft.

- **Visualizing the Draft** – Use the colored pencils to mark the margins to show how much of the paper is devoted to each claim or topic. Consider whether this seems like a balanced approach, or whether some sections need to be expanded and others contracted.

Tools for Reorganizing Ideas:

- **Reverse Outlining** – As you read through the paper, provide a phrase or sentence that describes the topic of each paragraph. List the topics in order on a separate sheet to consider whether this is the best organization for ideas.

- **Idea Mapping/Idea Charting** – Using the list from your reverse outline, chart the relationships between ideas (this works well for inverse-pyramid structures as well).

TIPS FOR ADDRESSING PARAGRAPH ORGANIZATION

Quick Check:

- **Problem Paragraph** – Pick a paragraph that seems like it may not be your strongest. Ask yourself:
  - Is the topic sentence clear?
  - Does the paragraph stick to this topic?
  - Does this topic relate clearly to the thesis?
  - Is the topic sentence backed by sufficient evidence?
  - Is all evidence introduced clearly and incorporated into the paragraph?

Tools for avoiding topic sentence slide:

- **Visualizing the Draft** – Use colored pencils to mark the topic sentence, and a different color for evidence that supports this sentence.

- **Identifying & Avoiding “Evidence Bombs”** – Use the “Tips for Incorporating Quotations” sheet to consider how to work quotations or facts more smoothly into your paper.

Tools for avoiding thesis slide:

- **Signposts** – One metaphor that may be helpful is that of the “signpost,” a sentence that tells readers where the argument has led them up to this point, and where they’re heading. Identify a few moments in your paper where “signpost” sentences may be useful.

- **Doorway vs. Hinge Transitions** – A metaphor that may be useful for considering transitions is that of a doorway (vs. a hinge). “Hinge” transitions have two sides – the
topic of the previous paragraph, & the topic of this paragraph. They’re connected by what they share in common. “Doorway” transitions have three sides. The two paragraphs are connected by their common (or contrasting) relationship with the thesis.

Sources:
