When revising a draft, remember there are multiple facets of writing that work together—and build upon one another—to form the whole. Think of these facets as layers of a pyramid:

- **Usage** (grammar, punctuation, spelling)
- **Style** (sentence variety, tone, word choice)
- **Organization** (order and linking of ideas)
- **Content** (thesis and its development)

Notice that content forms the base because content should be thought of as the foundation on which everything else relies. Each subsequent layer represents the next level of concern in the revision process. This handout walks you through the stages of revision one level at a time so that you will learn an approach to setting the proper priorities for revising. Page numbers refer to *The St. Martin’s Handbook, 7th edition*, by Andrea Lunsford. The handout includes a revision checklist on the second page that you can use while revising your drafts.

**LEVEL ONE: CONTENT**
- When working on a course assignment, look at the instructor’s guidelines and highlight any areas your paper has not addressed. Be sure you focus on these areas while revising.
- Underline your thesis statement. If you cannot locate your thesis, be sure that you revise your introduction so that it clearly states your purpose/central idea. Refer to Chapter 4, p. 91.
- Highlight areas where you introduce evidence and reasoning to support your thesis. Evaluate the overall support provided for your thesis.

**LEVEL TWO: ORGANIZATION**
- Underline the topic sentences in the body paragraphs. If a paragraph has no topic sentence, create one that accurately states the main idea covered. Refer to pp. 109-11 and Chapter 4.
- Read the underlined topic sentences. Ask yourself whether the order of paragraphs is the most effective way to develop your thesis/main idea. Refer to pp. 55-60 and Chapter 4 for more suggestions.
- Incorporate transitional words or phrases at the beginning or end of each paragraph to improve logical flow from one paragraph to the next. Refer to pp. 127-28 and Chapter 4.
- Read each paragraph again to ensure the sentences develop the topic sentence. Make sure each sentence presents new information. If a sentence repeats information, try combining or omitting it. Refer to Chapter 4.
- Logical flow and transitional phrases are necessary within each paragraph. Sentences should flow smoothly. Refer to pp. 55-60 and Chapter 4 for more information about paragraph organization.
LEVEL THREE: STYLE

➢ Consistent tone and voice are important in effective writing. Read your draft, listening for passages, sentences, or word choices where your attitude has shifted—has become too informal or in some way inappropriate for your audience or writing task. Refer to pp. 94 and 98.
➢ Using outside sources is an important part of effective writing; however, you don’t want the language of others to dominate your writing. Choose your quotations and paraphrases effectively and incorporate them into your own text smoothly. Refer to pp. 276-79.
➢ For suggestions on sentence variety refer to pp. 693-99.

LEVEL FOUR: USAGE

➢ Grammatical errors, such as fragments, comma splices, and dangling modifiers, can distract your reader and may even cause misunderstanding. Try reading your paper aloud to a friend (or reverse the roles). You may be able to catch many of your surface errors. Refer to Chapters 29-33 for additional grammar help.
➢ Another way to find sentence-level errors is to read each sentence in the paper, starting with the very last and working your way backwards to the first. This strategy takes your attention away from content and organization and better focuses your attention on grammar.
➢ Though tedious, punctuating correctly is essential. If you are aware of particular weaknesses in your writing, check your paper carefully for these issues. Refer to Chapters 44-49.

Revision Checklist

CONTENT

☐ Does your draft fulfill the concerns of the assignment?
☐ Is there a clear central idea/thesis?
☐ Is the thesis developed through facts, examples, and reasoning?
☐ Is each subtopic adequately supported?
☐ Are the facts, examples, and reasoning relevant to each subtopic?

ORGANIZATION

☐ Does the order in which you have presented your information make sense?
☐ Do paragraphs flow together by means of clear logic and transitional phrasing?
☐ Are sentences within the paragraphs arranged in a logical order?

STYLE

☐ Does your voice/tone remain consistent throughout your work?
☐ Have you paraphrased correctly?
☐ Have you incorporated quotations into your writing smoothly?
☐ Is there enough sentence variety?
☐ Are the word choices clear, accurate, and appropriate?

USAGE

☐ Have you avoided common grammar errors like fragments, comma splices, fused sentences, dangling modifiers, verb tense shifts, and faulty pronoun agreement?
☐ Have you used correctly apostrophes, commas, and capitalization?
☐ Did you read aloud and spell check?