

Crafting Metacritical Essays

As you wrap up your essay writing processes, it makes very good sense to engage in a little critical reflection. Seize this opportunity to identify the concepts with which you would like individual advice from your instructor.

Instead of producing metawriting in which you simply summarize your process or assess your product or both, craft a succinct set of paragraphs in which you reveal specific decisions you made while revising the essay, about which you still have specific questions! In other words, use your metacritical essay to ask your instructor questions about the individual decisions in which you are least confident.

Ask your questions as specifically as you can. A question like “How can I make my essay better?” is unlikely to elicit useful advice.

One pattern for asking specific questions is “The Delta Question.” You recall that in science and mathematics, delta = change, right?

The Delta (Δ) Question

Questions in the form of The Delta Question often present five (5) parts:

1. a specific question asked of the instructor about a specific element of the essay
2. “before” text, usually drawn from the PR draft
3. a suggestion offered by a peer reviewer, with reasoning, and text drawn from the PR received
4. “after” text, usually drawn from the IR draft
5. your reason for the change, even where $\Delta = 0$. In this case, you would explain why the “before” text and the “after” text are identical.

The parts of the Delta Question can appear in any order and often begin and end with the question. A single Delta Question usually contains 2 or 3 pieces of textual evidence and two or three bits of reasoning. By asking sincere questions of a more experienced writer, you can help to ensure that you receive specific advice on topics that interest you while also assuming greater responsibility for your growth as a writer.

**** The Bottom Line:** Please submit metacritical essays that contain 3-6 thoughtful Delta Questions, thereby allowing you to determine a significant portion of my response to your essay!

Sample Metacritical Essay Body Paragraph

Another question I would like to ask is about pronoun/antecedent clarity. This topic is brought up by Ahmad (yet again) in his Peer Review. He wrote “When writing for a Writing 121 class you need to understand that we are all ignorant animals and we might not understand when you use the word ‘they’ instead of ‘Apples and oranges’” (Al Sabai 2). Ahmad is pretty smart, so I edited my essay a bit and tried to cut out all of the instances of the word “they.” But then I ran into sentences in my PR Draft like this one: “Two more similarities between apples and oranges are the facts that they both grow on... (1)” If I followed Ahmad’s advice, the sentence would be revised to: “Two more similarities of apple and oranges are the facts that apples and oranges both grow on... (1)”. It seemed silly to repeat “apples and oranges” like that in a sentence, not to mention that I should try to vary the word choice. The most simple way was to replace one of the cases with the word “they” which meant I ended up with my original sentence: “Two more similarities between apples and oranges are the facts that they both grow on... (1)” You said to try to limit pronoun uses, but you never said to get rid of them altogether. With this thought I decided to just use “they.” I’m sure that if there are any other times when I should not have used “they” or any other pronoun you will not hesitate to tell me so as you have done on nearly every review that you have given me. But in this case, have I made a good choice in using the pronoun “they” to refer to both subjects?

Art Leo 8/27/14 11:20 AM

Comment: As you consider this ¶, please note all the parts of the Δ Question.

Art Leo 8/27/14 11:20 AM

Comment: ¶TS reveals the topic of the ¶.

Art Leo 8/27/14 11:20 AM

Comment: TEXTUAL EVIDENCE: These two sentences reveal the source of the concern by quoting and citing text from the Peer Review.

Art Leo 8/27/14 11:21 AM

Comment: REASONING: The next two sentences reveal why the writer is asking her question, in part by revealing a little Background information.

Art Leo 8/27/14 11:21 AM

Comment: “BEFORE” TEXT: the quotation from the Peer Review Draft

Art Leo 8/27/14 11:23 AM

Comment: The writer here considers the effects of applying Ahmad’s advice. In other words, she offers an “AFTER” TEXT that she will reject.

Art Leo 8/27/14 11:21 AM

Comment: REASONING: This sentence reveals WHY the writer chose her revision option.

Art Leo 8/27/14 11:21 AM

Comment: “AFTER” TEXT: The writer reveals that she decided in her Instructor Review Draft to stick with her original version of the sentence, which she provided earlier. In this case, $\Delta = 0$ (no change).

Art Leo 8/27/14 11:25 AM

Comment: “AFTER” TEXT: note that this the quotation is from the Instructor Review Draft

Art Leo 8/27/14 11:21 AM

Comment: QUESTION: ¶ concludes with a clear, specific question.