

**MMW3, Spring 2008**  
**Guidelines for Rough Draft Workshops**

**GUIDELINES FOR READERS:**

As you read each rough draft, pay close attention to the paper's structure, strength of evidence, completeness of argument, and overall coherence. Write your comments in the margins as you read; you might not remember your impressions if you don't record them right away. Plan to spend at least one hour per rough draft. As you read, make sure that you do the following:

**Introduction:**

- Find the *thesis statement*. Double underline it.
- Note where the thesis statement is *located*. Comment on whether its placement makes it easy to identify (e.g., it's at the beginning or the end of the introduction) or whether it seem to be buried in the middle of a paragraph.
- Note how the author words the thesis statement. Comment on whether or not the wording makes it easy for you to tell that this is the thesis.
- Note whether the thesis is *arguable*. If not, can you suggest a way to revise it?
- Does the introduction tell you why you might want to read the paper? If not, comment on what the author could add or change that would make the paper more inviting.

**Body paragraphs:**

- Find the *topic sentence* of each paragraph. Underline it.
- Note whether each topic sentence is *relevant* to the thesis. Mark any that are not.
- Imagine that you have made a *list* of all the topic sentences in this paper (or actually make such a list). Can you figure out, by reading through this list, the logical development of the author's main claims? Mark any place where you seem to lose the thread of the argument. Mark any place where the argument gets repetitive.
- Do all of the sentences in each paragraph *relate* to that paragraph's topic sentence? Mark any sentences that seem out of place. Suggest, if you can, a better place in the paper to put them (i.e., a paragraph in which they would seem more relevant).
- Look at the *transitions*. Does the beginning of each paragraph follow logically from the end of the previous one? Mark an especially effective transition. Mark a transition that you think needs to be revised (if there is one). Suggest, if you can, a way to make that transition work.

**The argument as a whole:**

- Does the author provide *support* for each main point? Mark any points that you believe require more evidence.
- Does the author *explain the relevance* of the evidence to his/her argument? Point out where the evidence is explained particularly effectively. Mark the places where you believe that more explanation would strengthen or clarify the argument.
- Does the author acknowledge *alternative hypotheses* or *counter-arguments* to his or her main points? Make a note at the end of the paper if you believe that the author does not acknowledge any alternative interpretations or counter-arguments, or if the alternatives that are offered are unpersuasive or unsupported by relevant evidence.
- Does the author acknowledge the *sources* of his or her information? Mark any places in the paper where you are unsure of whether the idea comes from the author or from a source.

**Conclusion:**

Comment on how well the conclusion meets these conventional criteria:

- It does not contain new data.
- It sums up the argument of the paper.
- It goes beyond recapitulating the introduction (e.g., it comments in an interesting way on the “so what?”).
- It leaves readers with a last thought or reflection on the topic.

**Overall comments:**

- What did you like best about this paper? (This can be a long list.)
- What do you think is the single most important revision the author can make?

**GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS:**

While your peers will do most of the talking when it comes time to discuss your paper, you'll get a lot more out of the discussion if you take an active role. Your readers can be a valuable resource, so tell them what you are trying to do and ask them for their advice. To get the most helpful feedback possible, write notes to your readers—at the ends of sections, at places where you are stuck and your paper comes to a dead stop, and/or at the end of the whole draft. What you can put in such notes includes:

**Those aspects of the paper that you think don't work:** Alert your readers to the rough spots: tortuous introductions, weak counter-arguments, and the like. That way, they won't waste their time telling you what you already know, and you can ask for advice where *you* think it will be most useful.

**Gaps in your paper:** Let your readers know what the problem is and what you think you're going to do about it. Square brackets are good for this purpose; you can simply write something like:

[Gentle Readers: I know that I have to make a logical connection between my sections on Chinese foot-binding and Byzantine foot fetishes, but I haven't come up with a good argument. Any ideas?]

or:

[Dear Everybody: I didn't have time to write this section yet, but this is where I'm going to introduce the new evidence concerning Roman horse worship.]

In general, think of notes to your readers as part of a conversation in which you will all share useful information. The people in your group will be responding as good readers who happen not to know very much about your topic or your purpose. You can make sure that you get the feedback you need from them if you tell them what it is that you would most like to know.