

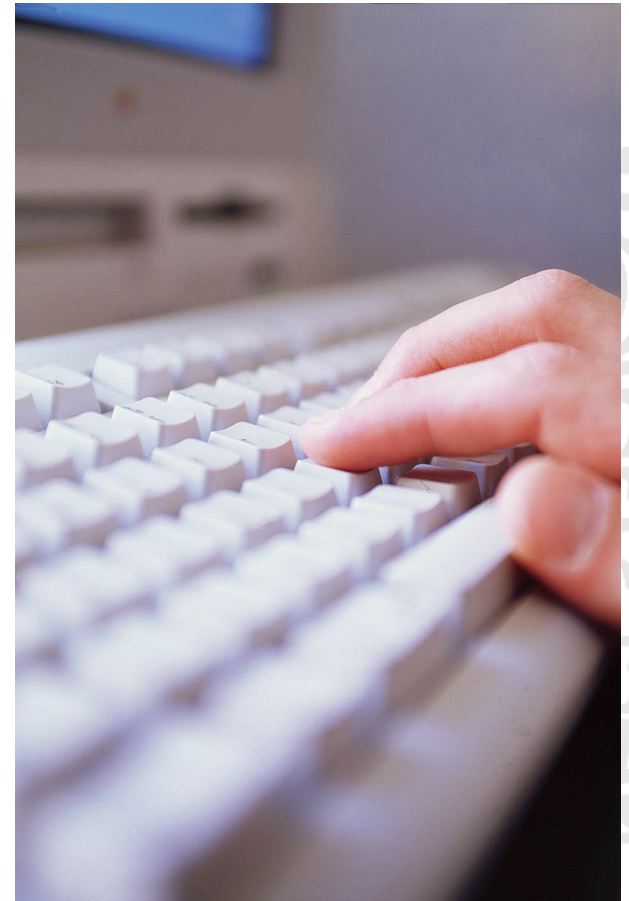


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Peer review for graduate students

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The Language Workshop

PhD student seminar, Polacksbacken, 17 March 2016





Reading other people's texts: Different aspects

Focus on

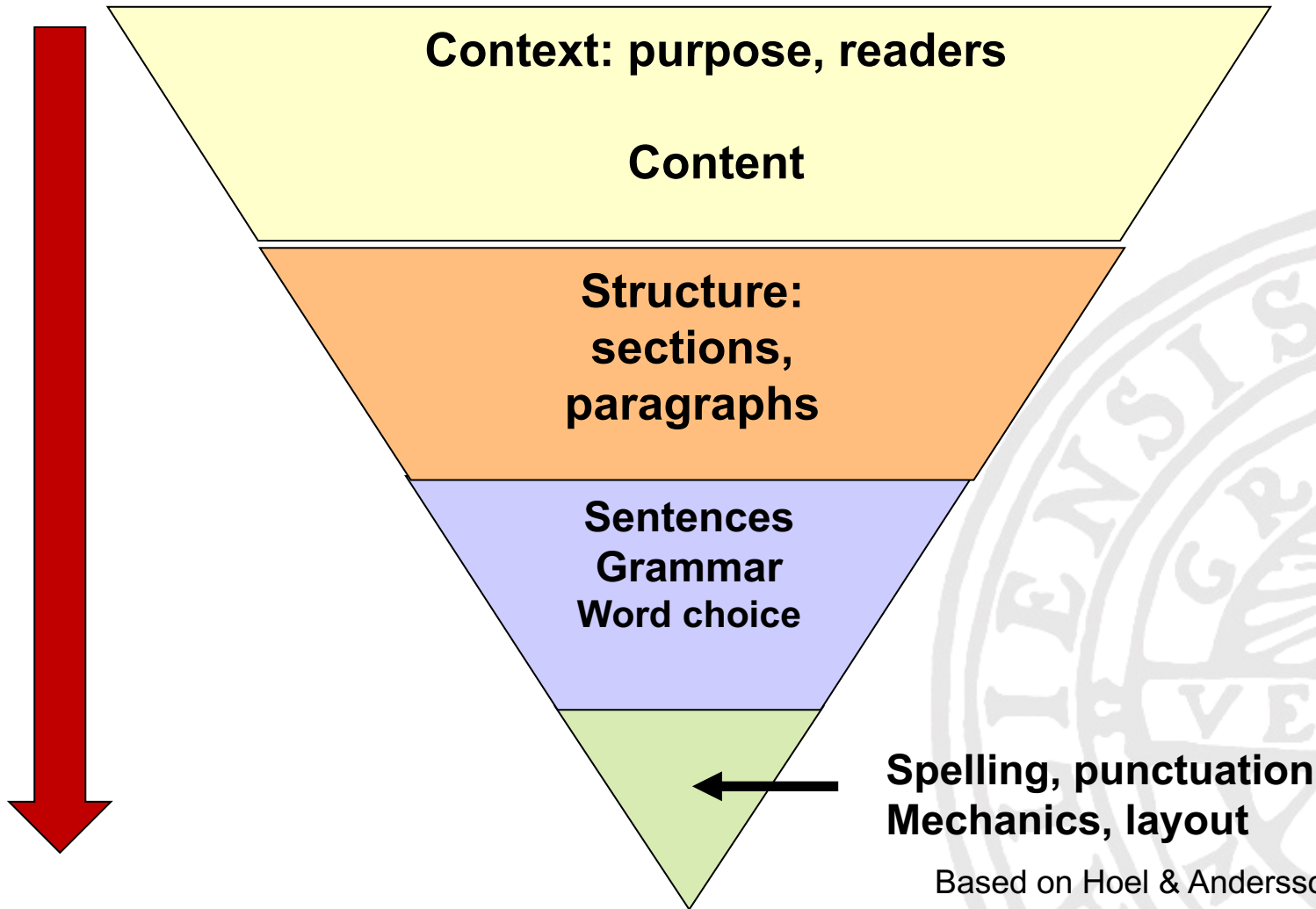
- content
- structure
- language
- form

Provide feedback that's helpful and
constructive

Accept feedback from others



Where to start





What to ask

Context: purpose, readers

Content

What is the focus of the paper?

What are the claims, and the evidence?

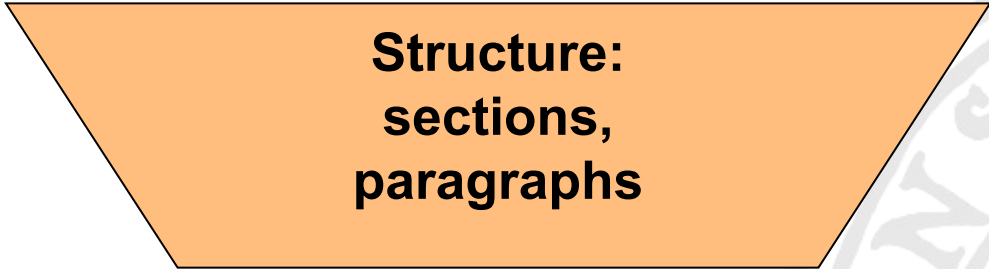
Are the claims valid?

Are the limitations of the paper clearly defined?



What to ask

Are the sections of the paper clearly defined? Does all content belong where it has been placed?



**Structure:
sections,
paragraphs**

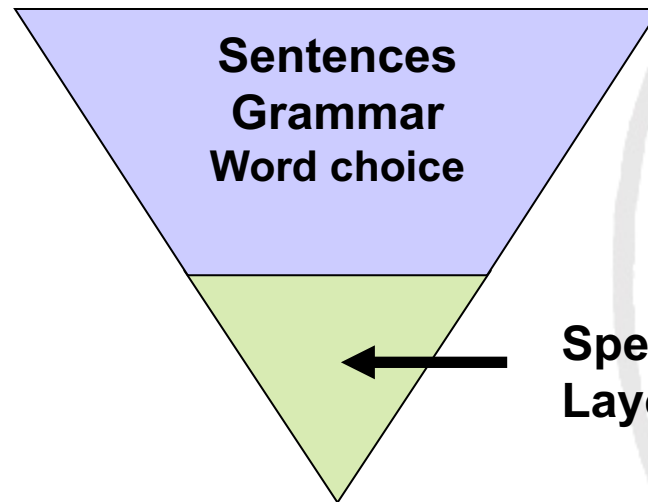
Is the information logically structured? Could there be other ways to present the information?



What to ask

Is the language scientifically adequate?

Are there ways in which the information
could be conveyed more clearly?



Spelling, punctuation
Layout



To reflect on

Is the paper interesting? Why/why not?



Did the introduction make you
want to read the rest?

Does the paper have a satisfactory
conclusion?



How to comment

Mention positive and negative points

Use strengths to point out weaknesses

Especially at the early stages of a paper,
asking questions can be more helpful
than making statements



Be specific!

Less helpful:

“This is a very interesting paper”

More helpful:

“The project idea is important
(because of x) and your evidence
(especially y) is convincing”

Less helpful:

“It was hard to understand”

More helpful:

“The sections x and y were hard to
understand because of z”



Formulating helpful feedback

If something is unclear...

...try to define (to yourself) *why* it is so

If you disagree with something...

...suggest an improvement



Formulating helpful feedback

Less helpful comment:

“This is badly structured.”

Helpful comment:

“This paragraph describes the underlying theory as well as your own application of the theory, but the two are mixed together and it’s hard to see which is which. Perhaps you could separate them into different paragraphs?”



Formulating helpful feedback

Less helpful comment:

“This is badly structured.”

Helpful comment:

“Start by describing the experiment and what you measure in general terms, then describe the experiment setup, and finally describe all the details of the rig.” (Sandstrom 2016)



Formulating helpful feedback

Less helpful comment:

“The language needs work.”

Helpful comments:

“It was hard for me to understand what you meant because you used different terms for the same thing.”

“The language is a bit informal, for instance (here and here).”



Formulating helpful feedback

Less helpful comment:

“**Too much detail**”

Helpful comments:

“(These specific details) don’t really add anything to what you said in the section above.”

“Perhaps you could summarise this in a table/graph.”



Formulating helpful feedback

Less helpful comment:

“Not enough detail”

Helpful comment:

“It would be much easier to understand what you did if you added some more details about x.”



Formulating helpful feedback

Comment on minor language errors, or not?

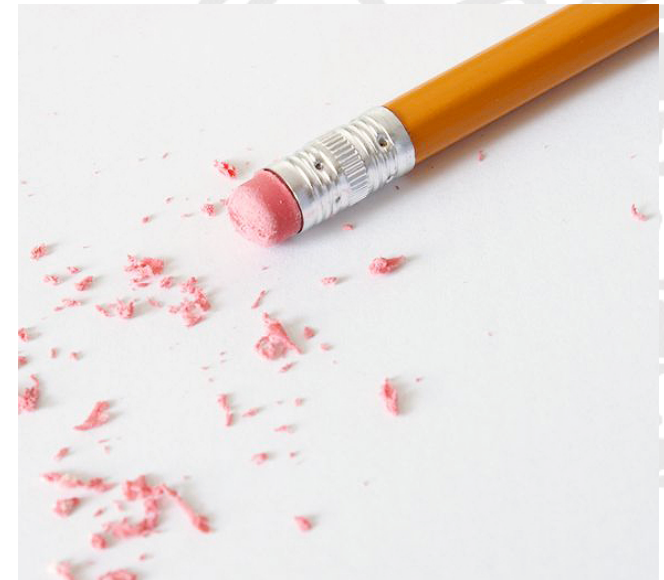
- + we all want to eliminate errors to make our texts look more professional
- + such errors can be relatively easy to spot, and to fix
- commenting on someone's language can be threatening
- it can shift the focus from overreaching issues to minor details



Comment or rewrite?

Sometimes it can feel easier to simply remove and rewrite the bits we don't like in somebody else's paper.

Is this a good idea?
Why/why not?





Written versus spoken feedback

The best feedback is often given in person,
face-to-face



Potential issues:

- embarrassment (of either party)
- severe problems with the paper



What are the best strategies for conveying feedback?





Receiving feedback gracefully

It is about your text, not about yourself

Take what you need, leave the rest
...but be appreciative!





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Thank you for your attention!

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References

- Løkensgard Hoel, Torlaug, and Mikael Andersson. 2001. *Skriva och samtala. Lärande genom responsgrupper*. Studentlitteratur.
- Sandstrom, Karen. 2016. Peer Review Practices of L2 Doctoral Students in the Natural Sciences. PhD diss. *Umeå Studies in Language and Literature* 31. Umeå: Umeå University.

