

Re-Seeing the Argument

Step 1: Skim your draft quickly, to refresh your memory of what's there. Then flip the draft and on the back write in just one or two sentences – a very quick “soundbite” – the argument, stance, or question that's at the center of this draft.

Step 2: Read your draft slowly, paragraph by paragraph. By each paragraph jot down the gist(s) of the paragraph and how it fits with/expands/complicates/strays from the argument or question you thought was at the center of this draft.

Step 3: Flip the page over and try a second version of summing up the argument, stance, or question that's at the center of this draft.

Step 4: Choose from among the following, making notes and writing on your draft, on the back of the draft, in a notebook – whatever the prompt you choose inspires:

- * What are the key words or key oppositions that run through your draft and structure its argument or point of view? Where and how are you consciously defining, highlighting, dramatizing, and working with/against the grain of these key words or key oppositions? Where and how might you do so more?
- * Who are the other voices joining yours in this draft's conversation or debate? From where and whom are you drawing your evidence? And in the process, who and what might you be overlooking or leaving out?
- * How would you characterize your voice(s) in this draft? Look at diction (word choice), syntax (sentence structure and variety), tone and style. Look too at how frequently you begin a sentence with “There is” or “It was,” how frequently you do or don't use “I,” “you,” “we.” Is there a particular voice or tone that seems shut out in the current draft? Overused? Is there a section that could benefit from “code-switching” or “diglossia” (e.g., mixing together a down-home voice with an academic voice) or more variation in voice register or sentence rhythm?
- * What would you want a reader to walk away from this draft thinking, realizing, questioning, getting ready to do? What would you *not* want a reader to walk away from this draft thinking, realizing, questioning, getting ready to do? Is there a dangerous reading of this argument – a dangerous reading you'd like to avoid, or perhaps confront?

Step 5: Read through your draft and new notes/writing a final time, flip the draft over, and on the back write a third version of what you see now as the central argument, stance, or question in your draft.