A Helicopter View of Revising, Editing, and Proofreading

Many people use the terms *revising*, *editing*, and *proofreading* interchangeably, yet while related, each action focuses on different components of a document. Below is an overview of each action's concerns.

LEVEL	FEATURES CALLING FOR ATTENTION IN A DOCUMENT	WHEN CHANGED, IT'S CALLED…
Higher-Order Concerns	**Content and Organizational Features, which includes:** • **Identifying the purpose and audience of our communication.** We need to clarify whether we are *informing* (that is, summarizing, explaining, reporting, updating) or *persuading* (arguing, pitching, selling) and, thereafter, the most appropriate primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences for the information in light of that purpose • **Identifying information that will help us achieve our purpose for our targeted audience.** We must decide what information can help us achieve the goals grounded in our purpose; to get started, we might ask conventional reporter questions: *who, what, where, when, why, how, how much, to what extent, with what value/concern*. We should further refine this information in light of our audience's familiarity with the material, as well as the audience's views of and biases toward the material and even those presenting it • **Framing and contextualizing information.** We may need to explain the questions, concerns, controversies… that warrant this discussion at this time to situate the discussion for audiences • **Determining most the most effective genre and conventions to relay the information and ideas we must present.** We must identify, verify, focus, and explain the examples, citations, data… to meet the format and style that audiences expect (based on the field or the context they represent) if we are to inform or persuade audiences in ways that achieve our goals • **Structuring and organizing information.** We should adopt the pattern(s) of organization that correspond with our goal to guide our audience(s) through the discussion with greatest efficiency and ease • **Testing the credibility and utility of all ideas.** We should verify the document includes everything our audience(s) will need or want to understand the information we are providing—as well as any value it may have for that audience—to enhance the effectiveness of our presentation; we should likewise eliminate information that may no longer be of use • **Verifying connections between main and minor points.** We should confirm that relationships between and among the details are both evident and logical, thereby increasing the cohesion and efficacy of our materials *Choices regarding these elements are determined and refined by a document's **purpose**, **audience**, and **context***	**Revising**
Middle-Order Concerns	*Style and Syntax Features, which includes:* focusing discussions, paragraphs, and sentences for clarity sequencing information within localized areas for structurally emphasizing and subordinating information according to the document's purpose clarifying or eliminating jargon, pompous language, and other references eliminating details and discussions that, while interesting, add nothing to the discussion, ensuring the most concise presentation using cohesive devices to clarify relationships between and among ideas varying the presentation of paragraphs and sentences (for example, structure and length) using grammar rhetorically (for example, subordination, active/passive voice constructions)	**Editing**
Lower-Order Concerns	*Surface-level Features, which includes:* ensuring the accuracy of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and formatting conventions	**Proofreading**

The shaded level should be the primary focus of all communication; after all, if we cannot explain *what* we are trying to convey, *to whom*, and *why*, it's premature to focus on the style and structure of sentences that may never appear in the final presentation. Once the higher-order elements are in place, however, we can enhance what we want to say by turning our attention to the middle- and lower-order concerns, thereby strengthening *how* we present our ideas to others.