Writing layers are a way of helping us to see a text in different ways in order to improve it. Every piece of writing consists of layers. Unpicking these different writing layers enables us to review the way we construct our writing. In doing so, we can improve various aspects of our writing, from our use of punctuation and choice of words, to the structure of our paragraphs and the broader focus of our writing.

There are a number of comparisons we can make to illustrate the layered nature of writing. For example, we can say that a text is composed like a symphony. The central idea or argument at the heart of our writing might be called the melody. The melody is delivered through a range of notes. In the context of writing, the central idea or argument (the melody), is delivered through the use of words and punctuation. We structure our movements in paragraphs. We return to the thesis like a chorus. Songs have tempo and tuning, but texts have grammar.

In order to orchestrate the piece, we need to understand all the parts. We organise the parts into writing layers. We’re going to use four layers: word, sentence, paragraph, and essay (or central argument). You can use this structure as a system for revising your texts.

Here’s what to look out for in each layer:

**Word layer**
- Are there any unnecessarily large words that impede the flow and clarity of your writing?
- Are complicated words explained well?
- Is the spelling accurate?
- Are the verbs distinct and interesting?
  - Tip: avoid relying on *is, was, were, been, has, have, had*

**Sentence layer**
- Are there any long and convoluted sentences that could be broken down into two separate sentences?
- Is there variation in the length and structure of your sentences?
- Do too many sentences begin with the same word?
- Is the correct punctuation used?
  - Tip: as a rule, commas are safest. Dashes, colons, and semi-colons are trickier.
Paragraph layer

- Does the introduction clarify the argument and map out the text’s main points?
- Does each paragraph have a structure?
  - Tip: this is the most common paragraph structure
- Topic sentence: introduce the main point of the paragraph.
- Introduce the evidence: quotes, statistics, data, concept.
- Discuss the evidence: evaluate the information presented and analyse it in relation to your focus.
- Conclusion or transition: either conclude your paragraph with a sentence or two that reinforces the purpose of the paragraph in relation to the topic sentence and your broader argument, or provide a transitionary statement that guides the reader to the next paragraph.
- Does each paragraph have a single focus?
  - Tip: if not, consider refining your focus or separating ideas into different paragraphs.
- Do your paragraph topics flow in a logical and coherent order?

Essay layer

- Does the text respond to the task assigned?
- Is the focus of the paper specific enough?
- Are all the references correctly formatted?
- Are margins and headings all formatted correctly?
- Does the word count adhere to the guidelines set?

OK, so how do I actually do this?

As you are reading through your work, pay particular attention to one writing layer at a time. You may wish to focus on one particular area at a time, such as your use of punctuation within the word layer. Whichever way you choose to approach the revision process, ensure that you only ever work on a single layer at a time to help refine your focus. The bullet points above will help you to target particular areas of revision, but give some serious thought across all layers to style, structure, audience and the purpose of your text.