



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH  
Centre for Open Learning

English Language Education

# Academic Writing for Postgraduates

## Part 2



DUGALD STEWART

1 Reading

2 Sources & Referencing

3 Writing

## Pause for Thought

What is information flow and how is it managed in English?



# What is information flow?

An important consideration for successful communication is flow – moving from one statement in a text to the next. Naturally, establishing a clear connection of ideas is important to help your reader follow the text.

Swales and Feak (2004)

*Academic Writing for Graduate Students*

## Logical information flow through a paragraph

Paragraph units are most effective when they either

- 1 discuss a single topic; or
- 2 discuss a series of related topics that build on one another. You can fulfil reader expectations by maintaining a *logical flow* of grammatical subjects in a paragraph.

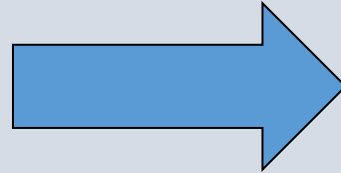
There are two primary ways to accomplish this:

- 1 Maintain a common subject throughout a one-topic paragraph
- 2 Shift the subject appropriately according to the story

## Logical information flow: Sentences

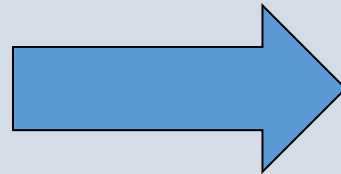
In English sentences, old (known) information usually comes before new (unknown) information.

**topic**



**comment**

old/known  
information



new/unknown  
information

## Logical information flow: Sentences

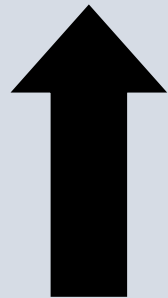
Most sentences in English have two parts:

- a **topic (theme)** – what the sentence is about
- a **comment (rheme)** – what the writer/speaker wants to tell you about the topic

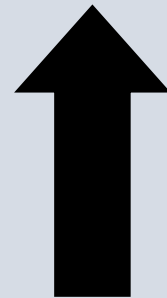
## Logical information flow: Sentences

Question: Where is Anton?

Answer: Anton's at the cinema.



theme



rheme



## Logical information flow: Sentences

- The **theme** is what you are writing about - it is *old* or *known* or *given* information.
- The **rheme** is what you are saying about the **theme** - it is *new* information, what you want to tell your reader.

## Logical information flow: Quick Exercise

Identify the **theme** (topic) and **rheme** (comment):

1. The M8 goes from Edinburgh to Glasgow.
2. The motorway from Edinburgh to Glasgow is called the M8.

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## Logical Information Flow: Problem text?

To stop the outbreak of the unknown disease, two medical teams were sent immediately to the affected area in Sichuan to diagnose the disease. Ten doctors selected from the first-rate hospitals across the country formed each medical team. The expertise of all the doctors was well-known in China, and some was world-famous.



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## Logical information flow through a paragraph: Choice 1

Epigenetics is the study of heritable changes in gene function that do not involve changes in the DNA sequence. The Greek prefix epi- in epigenetics implies features that are "on top of" or "in addition to" the traditional genetic basis for inheritance. Epigenetics most often denotes changes in a chromosome that affect gene activity and expression. It can also be used to describe any heritable phenotypic change that does not derive from a modification of the genome, such as prions.



## Logical information flow through a paragraph: Choice 1

**Epigenetics** is the study of heritable changes in gene function that do not involve changes in the DNA sequence. **The Greek prefix epi-** in epigenetics implies features that are "on top of" or "in addition to" the traditional genetic basis for inheritance. **Epigenetics** most often denotes changes in a chromosome that affect gene activity and expression. **It** can also be used to describe any heritable phenotypic change that does not derive from a modification of the genome, such as prions.

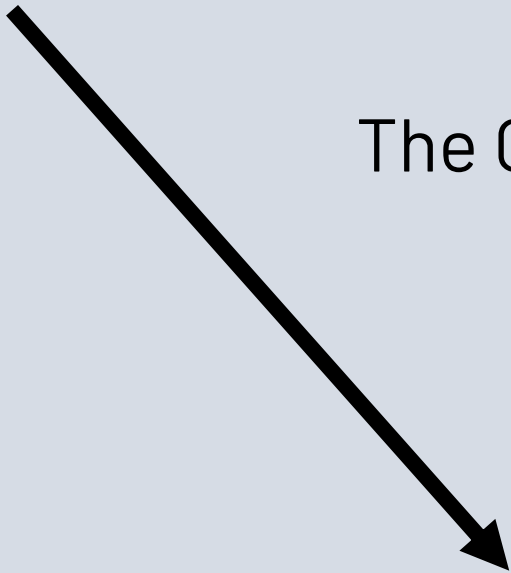
Logical information flow through a paragraph: Choice 1

Epigenetics => is the study of...

The Greek prefix epi....

Epigenetics

It (epigenetics)



## Logical information flow through a paragraph: Choice 2

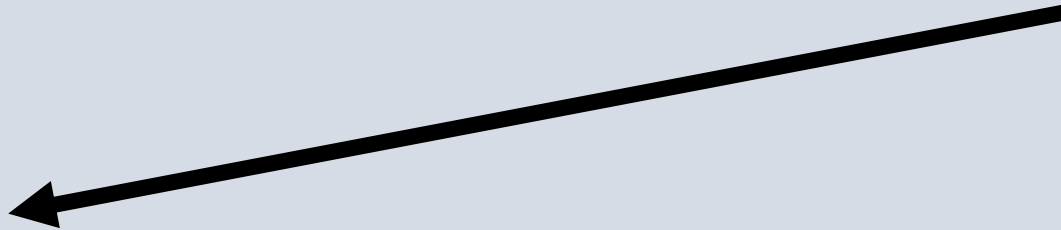
The early feminist movement was greatly influenced by works like "*On the Vindication of the Rights of Women*" (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft. She proposed a feminist agenda whose aims were to expose the exclusion of women from traditionally "male" spheres like politics, economics, education and religion, to take apart these structures, which denied women their deserved rights and attempt to achieve these rights for them in the male dominated spheres. These aims became a main focus for religious women in particular, at the time, in the United States.

## Logical information flow through a paragraph: Choice 2

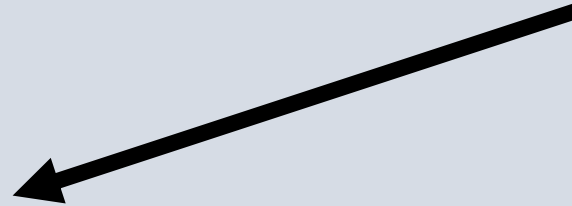
The early feminist movement was greatly influenced by works like "*On the Vindication of the Rights of Women*" (1792) by **Mary Wollstonecraft**. **She** proposed **a feminist agenda whose aims** were to expose the exclusion of women from traditionally "male" spheres like politics, economics, education and religion, to take apart these structures, which denied women their deserved rights and attempt to achieve these rights for them in the male dominated spheres. **These aims** became a main **focus for religious women** in particular, at the time, in the United States.

## Logical information flow through a paragraph: Choice 2

Early feminist movement => Mary Wollstonecraft



She => feminist agenda (aims)



These aims => focus for religious women

# Be careful of...

- overusing the cohesive devices some of you learned for IELTS  
( *nowadays, moreover, furthermore, firstly, secondly* )
- Instead, you can use the following devices to make your text more cohesive.

# Repetition

**Patients** who repeatedly take overdoses pose considerable management difficulties. The problem-orientated approach is not usually effective with such **patients**. When a **patient** seems to be developing a pattern of chronic repeats, it is recommended that all staff engaged in his or her care meet to reconstruct each attempt in order to determine whether there appears to be a motive common to each act.

## **This / These + noun**

account	discussion	pattern
advice	distinction	perspective
answer	discovery	position
argument	emphasis	proof
assertion	estimate	proposal
assumption	example	reference
concept	explanation	rejection
conclusion	fall	report
connection	finding	result
criticism	idea	rise
decrease	improvement	situation
description	increase	suggestion
claim	link	theory
comment	observation	view
difficulty	outcome	warning



# Cohesive Nouns

- 1) This d\_\_\_\_\_ **between high- and low-contact systems** provides a basis for classifying service production systems that can enable the manager to develop a more effective service operation.
  
- 2) Economic theory **ascribes the primary role** in the provision of public goods **to government**. This e\_\_\_\_\_ on government overlooks the role of the not-for-profit sector in providing collective-type goods.
  
- 3) **Melanoma cell lines that carried at least one copy of MTS1 frequently carried nonsense, missense, or frameshift mutations in the gene.** These f\_\_\_\_\_ suggest that MTS1 mutations are involved in tumor formation in a wide range of tissues. ...
  
- 4) Here we show that the annual flux of carbon from deforestation and abandonment of agricultural lands in the Brazilian Amazon was a source of **about 0.2 Pg C yr<sup>-1</sup> over the period 1989–1998 (1 Pg is 10<sup>15</sup> g)**. This e\_\_\_\_\_ is based on annual rates of deforestation and spatially detailed estimates of deforestation, regrowing forests and biomass.

# Cohesive Nouns

- 1) This **distinction between high- and low-contact systems** provides a basis for classifying service production systems that can enable the manager to develop a more effective service operation.
- 2) Economic theory **ascribes the primary role** in the provision of public goods **to government**. This **emphasis** on government overlooks the role of the not-for-profit sector in providing collective-type goods.
- 3) **Melanoma cell lines that carried at least one copy of MTS1 frequently carried nonsense, missense, or frameshift mutations in the gene.** These **findings** suggest that MTS1 mutations are involved in tumor formation in a wide range of tissues. ...
- 4) Here we show that the annual flux of carbon from deforestation and abandonment of agricultural lands in the Brazilian Amazon was a source of **about 0.2 Pg C yr<sup>-1</sup> over the period 1989–1998 (1 Pg is 10<sup>15</sup> g)**. This **estimate** is based on annual rates of deforestation and spatially detailed estimates of deforestation, regrowing forests and biomass.

# Verbs and Nouns

- Do not be afraid to use verbs!
- Verbal phrases v nominalization

We performed an analysis on the data and found...

**We analysed the data and found...**

- Nouns are useful when summarising the action in the previous sentence.

The data was analysed using SPSS. *This analysis* highlighted that ...

- A similar problem happens with long lists. Authors provide a long list of stuff with no context, and the verb doesn't show up until the end of the sentence:

Peanuts, shrimp, almonds, milk or anything else with lactose, and wheat or anything with gluten all represent things that people are commonly allergic to.

- You have no idea what you're reading until the end. When you find out, you must re-read the sentence to comprehend what these things have in common. To revise, just give the context before the list:

People are commonly allergic to things like peanuts, shrimp....

- Now the list can be any length without reducing understandability.

# If your feedback says...

## 1. *'You're not developing your points enough'*

Look at your paragraph structure. Have you too many points in each paragraph. Think 'one paragraph = one point'

- defining terms; using examples; citing data, statistics, evidence; comparing & contrasting; analysing the subject in question; evaluating causes & reasons; examining effects & consequences; and not just describing sources you cite but critically evaluating them

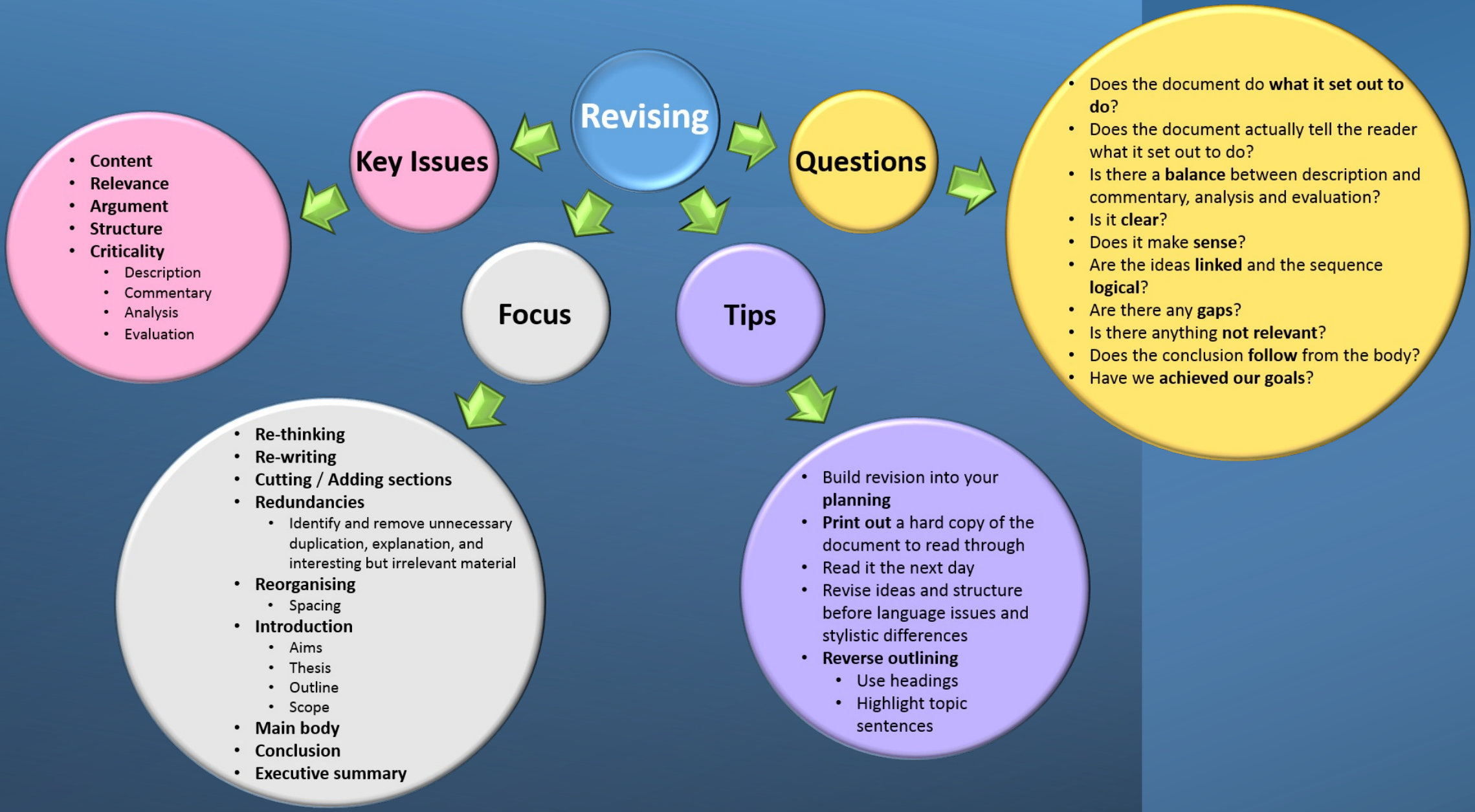
## 2. *'You need more evidence'*

Make sure that you provide at least one source in each paragraph, or your writing could be too anecdotal.

# Summary

Academic writing is:

- concise
- precise
- clear
- coherent



# Revising

## Key Issues

- Content
- Relevance
- Argument
- Structure
- Criticality
  - Description
  - Commentary
  - Analysis
  - Evaluation

## Questions

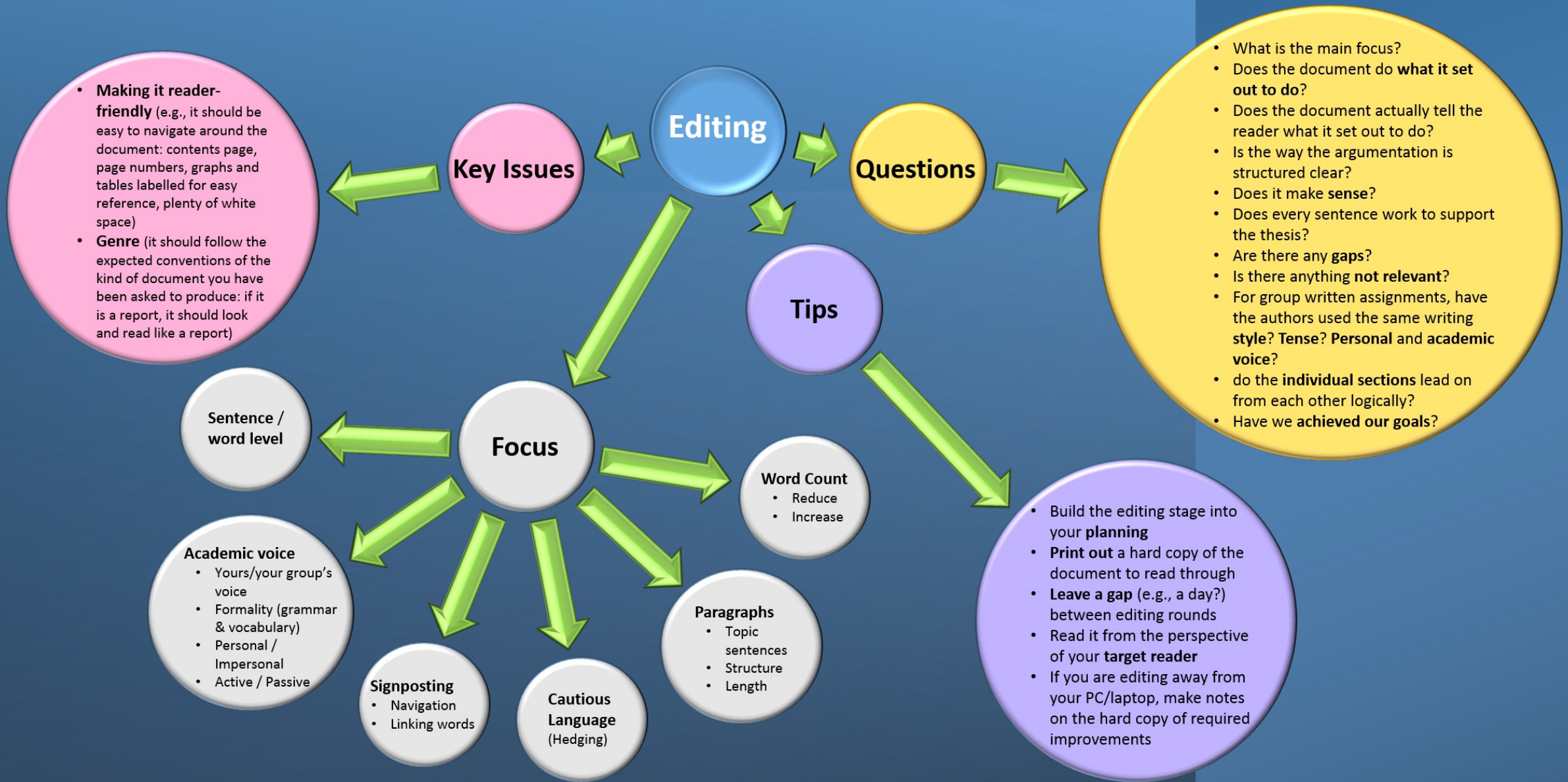
- Does the document do **what it set out to do**?
- Does the document actually tell the reader what it set out to do?
- Is there a **balance** between description and commentary, analysis and evaluation?
- Is it **clear**?
- Does it make **sense**?
- Are the ideas **linked** and the sequence **logical**?
- Are there any **gaps**?
- Is there anything **not relevant**?
- Does the conclusion **follow** from the body?
- Have we **achieved our goals**?

## Focus

- **Re-thinking**
- **Re-writing**
- **Cutting / Adding sections**
- **Redundancies**
  - Identify and remove unnecessary duplication, explanation, and interesting but irrelevant material
- **Reorganising**
  - Spacing
- **Introduction**
  - Aims
  - Thesis
  - Outline
  - Scope
- **Main body**
- **Conclusion**
- **Executive summary**

## Tips

- Build revision into your **planning**
- **Print out** a hard copy of the document to read through
- Read it the next day
- Revise ideas and structure before language issues and stylistic differences
- **Reverse outlining**
  - Use headings
  - Highlight topic sentences



- **Making it reader-friendly** (e.g., it should be easy to navigate around the document: contents page, page numbers, graphs and tables labelled for easy reference, plenty of white space)
- **Genre** (it should follow the expected conventions of the kind of document you have been asked to produce: if it is a report, it should look and read like a report)

**Key Issues**

**Editing**

**Questions**

**Tips**

**Focus**

**Sentence / word level**

**Word Count**

- Reduce
- Increase

**Paragraphs**

- Topic sentences
- Structure
- Length

**Cautious Language (Hedging)**

**Signposting**

- Navigation
- Linking words

**Academic voice**

- Yours/your group's voice
- Formality (grammar & vocabulary)
- Personal / Impersonal
- Active / Passive

- What is the main focus?
- Does the document do **what it set out to do**?
- Does the document actually tell the reader what it set out to do?
- Is the way the argumentation is structured clear?
- Does it make **sense**?
- Does every sentence work to support the thesis?
- Are there any **gaps**?
- Is there anything **not relevant**?
- For group written assignments, have the authors used the same writing **style**? **Tense**? **Personal** and **academic voice**?
- do the **individual sections** lead on from each other logically?
- Have we **achieved our goals**?

- Build the editing stage into your **planning**
- **Print out** a hard copy of the document to read through
- **Leave a gap** (e.g., a day?) between editing rounds
- Read it from the perspective of your **target reader**
- If you are editing away from your PC/laptop, make notes on the hard copy of required improvements



