Higher Order and Lower Order Concerns

The writing process consists of three main stages: Planning, Writing and Revising. At the Revising stage, there are three phases to revising your writing: Revision, Editing, and Proofreading. Often times, these phases can be referred to as Higher Order and Lower Order Concerns.

Higher Order Concerns
Higher Order Concerns are often addressed in the Revision Phase. During this phase, you will look at the purpose, audience, development of ideas, and organization of ideas.

Purpose
The first approach to writing anything is to consider your purpose for writing.
For example, for an academic essay, ask yourself: Why am I writing this? Is this essay arguing something? Am I asked to review a novel? What is my purpose?

Audience
Secondly, you need to ask: Who is my audience? Now, if this is an essay for a course, you may be tempted to answer: my professor! However, the general rule of thumb is that you are writing for your classmates. In other words, they are familiar with the content that you are writing about, in general, so you don’t need to explain every little detail; however, they are not “experts” in the field/content that you are writing, so you need to use examples and evidence to explain and support your main ideas.

Development of Ideas
Thirdly, when looking at the high order concerns, you need to look at the development of your ideas. Ask yourself: Is there anything missing in the evidence or examples that I’ve used to support my main ideas? Do I need to add something to make it clearer? Should I delete something?

Organization of Ideas
Lastly, you need to look at the overall organization of your essay. Are your points organized in a logical order that is easy for your reader to follow? Should the paragraph order be changed? Do you need to add transitions to connect the ideas together better?

Lower Order Concerns
Lower Order Concerns are often addressed in the Editing and Proofreading Phases.

Editing
During the editing phase, you will look at sentence structure, word choice and punctuation.
Sentence Structure
The first approach to the editing phase is to take a closer look at your sentence structure. Have you written in complete sentences? Are there any fragments or run-on sentences? Have you used a variety of types of sentences? Does your sentence structure help to make your meaning clear?

Word Choice
The second lower order concern is word choice. Remember one of the first approaches to writing is to consider your audience. Do the words you’ve chosen to use suit your audience and the purpose of your paper? Can you replace complex terms with simple words?

Punctuation
Next, you should look at your punctuation. Are there any errors that confuse the meaning? Do you need to review your punctuation rules?

Proofreading
Lastly, for proofreading, you want to fix your spelling errors. This is a final and important polishing step. Do you have any errors that haven’t been caught by Spell Check? For example, ‘there’ and ‘their’ are words that are often confused. The same thing can be said for “except” and “accept”. Pay attention to the details!

Next, look at the margins and spacing between paragraphs. Look at the overall visual of your essay. Is everything in place? Do you have the same font and size? It is important to review this before you submit any assignment for evaluation.