

RHETORICAL CONCERNS IN A SET OF NINTH GRADE COMPOSITIONS, OPTIMAL REVISIONS AND NON-OPTIMAL REVISIONS (222 pp.)

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This research investigated the rhetorical concerns ninth grade students used when writing to a persuasive prompt, and the rhetorical concerns they were able to use and declare when asked to revise optimally (Make It Better) and non-optimally (Make It Worse). The study used text analysis on 27 data sets to determine the metacognitive skills and metacognitive knowledge of students asked to write to a high-stakes type prompt. In addition, it sought a connection between metacognitive skills and holistic scores.

The study created a “rhetorical net” culled from revision research, existing high-stakes rubrics, and two pilot studies. Three co-raters and the researcher employed segment change analysis to determine which of twelve rhetorical concerns students used and named. All 27 students used *focus* and *development* in their original compositions; only 15 wrote persuasively. The Make It Better/Make It Worse protocol showed student attention to *word choice*, *sentence structure* and enhanced *development*, and three additional students used *persuasion* when optimally revising and four when non-optimally revising. Students failed to name as many rhetorical concerns as they used, thus showing more metacognitive skill than knowledge. The protocol helped students interact with their texts in a unique way—non-optimally revising—that allowed them to play with language, possibly uncovering new meaning.

Changing *length* did appear to positively influence holistic scores for the optimal revisions, while changing or enhancing *audience* negatively impacted scores. Surprisingly, a change in *persuasion* was not likely to lead to an improved holistic score. Additional research

using the protocol with different data may help explain the connections between rhetorical concerns and holistic scores.