

6 Editing and Proofreading

Editing and proofreading allow you to fine-tune your writing, making it ready to hand in. When you edit, look first for words, phrases, and sentences that sound awkward, uninteresting, or unclear. When you proofread, check your writing for spelling, mechanics, usage, and grammar errors. Ask one of your writing peers to help you.

The guidelines and strategies given in this chapter will help you edit your writing for style and clarity and proofread it for errors.

Learning Outcomes

- ▶ Understand editing.
- ▶ Combine short, simplistic sentences.
- ▶ Expand sentences to create a more expressive style.
- ▶ Improve sentence style.
- ▶ Use effective words.
- ▶ Proofread your writing.



Visually Speaking

▶ How does the image above connote editing and proofreading?
What tools could a writer use for this phase of the writing process?

Editing Your Revised Draft

When you have thoroughly revised your writing, you need to edit it so as to make it clear and concise enough to present to readers. Use the editing guidelines below to check your revised draft.

Review the overall style of your writing. ■ ■ ■

1. **Read your revised writing aloud.** Better yet, have a writing peer read it aloud to you. Highlight any writing that doesn't read smoothly and naturally.
2. **Check that your style fits the rhetorical situation.**

Goal: Does your writing sound as if you wrote it with a clear aim in mind? Do the sentence style and word choice match the goal?

Reader: Is the tone sincere? Does the writing sound authentic and honest?

Subject: Does the writing suit the subject and your treatment of it in terms of seriousness or playfulness, complexity or simplicity?

3. **Examine your sentences.** Check them for clarity, conciseness, and variety. Replace sentences that are wordy or rambling; combine or expand sentences that are short and choppy. Also, vary the beginnings of your sentences and avoid sentence patterns that are too predictable. (See pages 95–101.)

Consider word choice. ■ ■ ■

1. **Avoid redundancy.** Be alert for words or phrases that are used together but mean nearly the same thing.

repeat again red in color refer back

2. **Watch for repetition.** When used appropriately, repetition can add rhythm and coherence to your writing. When used ineffectively, however, it can be a real distraction.

The man looked as if he were in his late seventies. The man was dressed in an old suit. I soon realized that the man was homeless. . . .

3. **Look for general nouns, verbs, and modifiers.** Specific words are much more effective than general ones. (See page 102.)

The girl moved on the bench. (general)
Rosie slid quietly to the end of the park bench. (specific)

4. **Avoid highly technical terms.** Check for jargon or technical terms that your readers will not know or that you haven't adequately explained. (See page 103.)

As the capillaries bleed, platelets work with fibrinogens to form a clot.

5. **Use fair language.** Replace words or phrases that are biased or demeaning. (See pages 104–106.)

■ Combining Sentences

Effective sentences often contain several basic ideas that work together to show relationships and make connections. Here are five basic ideas followed by seven examples of how the ideas can be combined into effective sentences.

1. The longest and largest construction project in history was the Great Wall of China.
2. The project took 1,700 years to complete.
3. The Great Wall of China is 1,400 miles long.
4. It is between 18 and 30 feet high.
5. It is up to 32 feet wide.

Edit short, simplistic sentences. ■ ■ ■

Combine your short, simplistic sentences into longer, more detailed sentences. Sentence combining is generally carried out in the following ways:

- Use a **series** to combine three or more similar ideas.
The Great Wall of China is **1,400 miles long, between 18 and 30 feet high, and up to 32 feet wide.**
- Use a **relative pronoun** (*who, whose, that, which*) to introduce subordinate (less important) ideas.
The Great Wall of China, **which is 1,400 miles long and between 18 and 30 feet high**, took 1,700 years to complete.
- Use an **introductory phrase or clause**.
Having taken 1,700 years to complete, the Great Wall of China was the longest construction project in history.
- Use a **semicolon** (and a conjunctive adverb if appropriate).
The Great Wall took 1,700 years to complete; **it is 1,400 miles long and up to 30 feet high and 32 feet wide.**
- Repeat a **key word or phrase** to emphasize an idea.
The Great Wall of China was the longest construction **project** in history, a **project** that took 1,700 years to complete.
- Use **correlative conjunctions** (*either, or; not only, but also*) to compare or contrast two ideas in a sentence.
The Great Wall of China is **not only** up to 30 feet high and 32 feet wide, **but also** 1,400 miles long.
- Use an **appositive** (a word or phrase that renames) to emphasize an idea.
The Great Wall of China—the **largest construction project in history**—is 1,400 miles long, 32 feet wide, and up to 30 feet high.

■ Expanding Sentences

Expand sentences when you edit so as to connect related ideas and make room for new information. Length has no value in and of itself: The best sentence is still the shortest one that says all it has to say. An expanded sentence, however, is capable of saying more—and saying it more expressively.

Use cumulative sentences. ■ ■ ■

Modern writers often use an expressive sentence form called the cumulative sentence. A cumulative sentence is made of a general “base clause” that is expanded by adding modifying words, phrases, or clauses. In such a sentence, details are added before and after the main clause, creating an image-rich thought. Here’s an example of a cumulative sentence, with the base clause or main idea in boldface:

In preparation for her Spanish exam, **Julie was studying** at the kitchen table, completely focused, memorizing a list of vocabulary words.

Discussion: Notice how each new modifier adds to the richness of the final sentence. Also notice that each of these modifying phrases is set off by a comma. Here’s another sample sentence:

With his hands on his face, **Tony was laughing** halfheartedly, looking puzzled and embarrassed.

Discussion: Such a cumulative sentence provides a way to write description that is rich in detail, without rambling. Notice how each modifier changes the flow or rhythm of the sentence.

Expand with details. ■ ■ ■

Here are seven basic ways to expand a main idea:

1. with **adjectives and adverbs**: *halfheartedly, once again*
2. with **prepositional phrases**: *with his hands on his face*
3. with **absolute phrases**: *his head tilted to one side*
4. with **participial (ing or ed) phrases**: *looking puzzled*
5. with **infinitive phrases**: *to hide his embarrassment*
6. with **subordinate clauses**: *while his friend talks*
7. with **relative clauses**: *who isn’t laughing at all*

INSIGHT: To edit sentences for more expressive style, it is best to (1) know your grammar and punctuation (especially commas); (2) practice tightening, combining, and expanding sentences using the guidelines in this chapter; and (3) read carefully, looking for models of well-constructed sentences.

■ Checking for Sentence Style

Writer E. B. White advised young writers to “approach sentence style by way of simplicity, plainness, orderliness, and sincerity.” That’s good advice from a writer steeped in style. It’s also important to know what to look for when editing your sentences. The information on this page and the following four pages will help you edit your sentences for style and correctness.

Avoid these sentence problems. ■■

Always check for and correct the following types of sentence problems. Turn to the pages listed below for guidelines and examples when attempting to fix problems in your sentences.

Short, Choppy Sentences: Combine or expand any short, choppy sentences; use the examples and guidelines on page 95.

Flat, Predictable Sentences: Rewrite any sentences that sound predictable and uninteresting by varying their structures and expanding them with modifying words, phrases, and clauses. (See pages 98–100.)

Incorrect Sentences: Look carefully for fragments, run-ons, and comma splices and correct them accordingly.

Unclear Sentences: Edit any sentences that contain unclear wording, misplaced modifiers, dangling modifiers, or incomplete comparisons.

Unacceptable Sentences: Change sentences that include nonstandard language, double negatives, or unparallel construction.

Unnatural Sentences: Rewrite sentences that contain jargon, clichés, or flowery language. (See page 103.)

Review your writing for sentence variety. ■■

Use the following strategy to review your writing for variety in terms of sentence beginnings, lengths, and types.

- In one column on a piece of paper, list the opening words in each of your sentences. Then decide if you need to vary some of your sentence beginnings.
- In another column, identify the number of words in each sentence. Then decide if you need to change the lengths of some of your sentences.
- In a third column, list the kinds of sentences used (exclamatory, declarative, interrogative, and so on). Then, based on your analysis, use the instructions on the next two pages to edit your sentences as needed.

Writing with Sources: When you integrate a quotation into the flow of text, make sure that the quotation works with the material around it. Either make the quotation a grammatical part of the sentence, or introduce the quotation with a complete sentence followed by a colon.

Vary sentence structures. ■■

To energize your sentences, vary their structures using one or more of the methods shown on this page and the next.

1. **Vary sentence openings.** Move a modifying word, phrase, or clause to the front of the sentence to stress that modifier. However, avoid creating dangling or misplaced modifiers.

The norm: We apologize for the inconvenience this may have caused you.

Variation: For the inconvenience this may have caused you, we apologize.

2. **Vary sentence lengths.** Short sentences (ten words or fewer) are ideal for making points crisply. Medium sentences (ten to twenty words) should carry the bulk of your information. When well crafted, occasional long sentences (more than twenty words) can develop and expand your ideas.

Short: Welcome back to Magnolia Suites!

Medium: Unfortunately, your confirmed room was unavailable last night when you arrived. For the inconvenience this may have caused you, we apologize.

Long: Because several guests did not depart as scheduled, we were forced to provide you with accommodations elsewhere; however, for your trouble, we were happy to cover the cost of last night’s lodging.

3. **Vary sentence kinds.** The most common sentence is declarative—it states a point. For variety, try exclamatory, imperative, interrogative, and conditional statements.

Exclamatory: Our goal is providing you with outstanding service!

Declarative: To that end, we have upgraded your room at no expense.

Imperative: Please accept, as well, this box of chocolates as a gift to sweeten your stay.

Interrogative: Do you need further assistance?

Conditional: If you do, we are ready to fulfill your requests.

INSIGHT: In creative writing (stories, novels, plays), writers occasionally use fragments to vary the rhythm of their prose, emphasize a point, or create dialogue. Avoid fragments in academic or business writing.

Writing with Sources: When you refer to ideas from a source, use the “historical present tense.” That is, refer to the person and her or his work in the present tense—“Einstein writes that relativity . . .” Use past tense only if you want to emphasize the pastness of the source.

4. **Vary sentence arrangements.** Where do you want to place the main point of your sentence? You make that choice by arranging sentence parts into loose, periodic, balanced, or cumulative patterns. Each pattern creates a specific effect.

■ Loose Sentence

The Travel Center offers an attractive flight-reservation plan for students, one that allows you to collect bonus miles and receive \$150,000 in life insurance per flight.

Analysis: This pattern is direct. It states the main point immediately (bold), and then tacks on extra information.

■ Periodic Sentence

Although this plan requires that you join the Travel Center's Student-Flight Club and pay the \$10 admission fee, **in the long run you will save money!**

Analysis: This pattern postpones the main point (bold) until the end. The sentence builds to the point, creating an indirect, dramatic effect.

■ Balanced Sentence

Joining the club in your freshman year will save you money over your entire college career; in addition, accruing bonus miles over four years will earn you a free trip to Europe!

Analysis: This pattern gives equal weight to complementary or contrasting points (bold); the balance is often signaled by a comma and a conjunction (*and*, *but*) or by a semicolon. Often a conjunctive adverb (*however*, *nevertheless*) or a transitional phrase (*in addition*, *even so*) will follow the semicolon to further clarify the relationship.

■ Cumulative Sentence

Because the club membership is in your name, **you can retain its benefits** as long as you are a student, even if you transfer to a different college or go on to graduate school.

Analysis: This pattern puts the main idea (bold) in the middle of the sentence, surrounding it with modifying words, phrases, and clauses.

5. **Use positive repetition.** Although you should avoid needless repetition, you might use emphatic repetition to repeat a key word to stress a point.

■ Repetitive Sentence

Each year, more than a million young people who read poorly leave high school unable to read well, functionally illiterate.

■ Emphatic Sentence

Each year, more than a million young people leave high school functionally illiterate, so **illiterate** that they can't read daily newspapers, job ads, or safety instructions.

Use parallel structure. ■ ■ ■

Coordinated sentence elements should be parallel—that is, they should be written in the same grammatical forms. Parallel structures save words, clarify relationships, and present the information in the correct sequence. Follow these guidelines.

1. For words, phrases, or clauses in a series, keep elements consistent.

Not parallel: I have tutored students in Biology 101, also Chemistry 102, not to mention my familiarity with Physics 200.

Parallel: I have tutored students in *Biology 101, Chemistry 102, and Physics 200.*

Not parallel: I have volunteered as a hospital receptionist, have been a hospice volunteer, and as an emergency medical technician.

Parallel: I have done volunteer work as *a hospital receptionist, a hospice counselor, and an emergency medical technician.*

2. Use **both parts of correlative conjunctions** (*either, or; neither, nor; not only, but also; as, so; whether, so; both, and*) so that both segments of the sentence are balanced.

Not parallel: *Not only* did Blake College turn 20 this year. Its enrollment grew by 16 percent.

Parallel: *Not only* did Blake College turn 20 this year, *but* its enrollment also grew by 16 percent.

3. Place a **modifier correctly** so that it clearly indicates the word or words to which it refers.

Confusing: MADD promotes *severely* punishing and eliminating drunk driving because this offense leads to a *great number* of deaths and sorrow.

Parallel: MADD promotes eliminating and *severely* punishing drunk driving because this offense leads to *many* deaths and *untold* sorrow.

4. Place **contrasting details in parallel structures** (words, phrases, or clauses) to stress a contrast.

Weak contrast: The average child watches 24 hours of television a week and reads for 36 minutes.

Strong contrast: Each week, the average child *watches television for 24 hours but reads for only about half an hour.*

Writing with Sources: When using sources, smoothly integrate text references to those sources. (For guidelines, see pages 491–528 for MLA and pages 529–558 for APA.)

Avoid weak constructions. ■■■

Avoid constructions (like those below) that weaken your writing.

■ Nominal Constructions

The nominal construction is both sluggish and wordy. Avoid it by changing the noun form of a verb (*description* or *instructions*) to a verb (*describe* or *instruct*). At the same time, delete the weak verb that preceded the noun.

NOMINAL CONSTRUCTIONS

(noun form underlined)

Tim gave a description . . .

Lydia provided instructions . . .

STRONG VERBS

Tim *described* . . .

Lydia *instructed* . . .

Sluggish: John *had a discussion* with the tutors regarding the incident. They gave him their *confirmation* that similar developments had occurred before, but they had not *provided* submissions of their reports.

Energetic: John *discussed* the incident with the tutors. They *confirmed* that similar problems had developed before, but they hadn't *submitted* their reports.

■ Expletives

Expletives such as “it is” and “there is” are fillers that serve no purpose in most sentences—except to make them wordy and unnatural.

Sluggish: *It is* likely that Nathan will attend the Communication Department's Honors Banquet. *There is* a journalism scholarship that he might win.

Energetic: Nathan will likely attend the Communication Department's Honors Banquet and might win a journalism scholarship.

■ Negative Constructions

Sentences constructed upon the negatives *no*, *not*, *neither/nor* can be wordy and difficult to understand. It's simpler to state what *is* the case.

Negative: During my four years on the newspaper staff, *I have not been* behind in making significant contributions. My editorial skills *have* certainly *not deteriorated*, as I have *never failed* to tackle challenging assignments.

Positive: During my four years on the newspaper staff, *I have made* significant contributions. My editorial skills have steadily *developed* as I *have tackled* difficult assignments.

Avoiding Imprecise, Misleading, and Biased Words



As you edit your writing, check your choice of words carefully. The information on the next five pages will help you edit for word choice.

Substitute specific words. ■■■

Replace vague nouns and verbs with words that generate clarity and energy.

■ Specific Nouns

Make it a habit to use specific nouns for subjects. General nouns (*woman*, *school*) give the reader a vague, uninteresting picture. More specific nouns (*actress*, *university*) give the reader a better picture. Finally, very specific nouns (*Meryl Streep*, *Notre Dame*) are the type that can make your writing clear and colorful.

GENERAL TO SPECIFIC NOUNS

Person	Place	Thing	Idea
woman	school	book	theory
actor	university	novel	scientific theory
Meryl Streep	Notre Dame	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	relativity

■ Vivid Verbs

Like nouns, verbs can be too general to create a vivid word picture. For example, the verb *looked* does not say the same thing as *stared*, *glared*, *glanced*, or *peeked*.

- Whenever possible, use a verb that is strong enough to stand alone without the help of an adverb.

Verb and adverb: John fell down in the student lounge.

Vivid verb: John **collapsed** in the student lounge.

- Avoid overusing the “be” verbs (*is*, *are*, *was*, *were*) and helping verbs. Often a main verb can be made from another word in the same sentence.

A “be” verb: Cole is someone who follows international news.

A stronger verb: Cole **follows** international news.

- Use active rather than passive verbs. (Use passive verbs only if you want to downplay who is performing the action in a sentence. See page 81.)

Passive verb: Another provocative essay was submitted by Kim.

Active verb: Kim **submitted** another provocative essay.

- Use verbs that show rather than tell.

A verb that tells: Dr. Lewis is very thorough.

A verb that shows: Dr. Lewis **prepares** detailed, interactive lectures.

Replace jargon and clichés. ■■■

Replace language that is overly technical or difficult to understand. Also replace overused, worn-out words.

■ Understandable Language

Jargon is language used in a certain profession or by a particular group of people. It may be acceptable to use if your audience is that group of people, but to most ears jargon will sound technical and unnatural.

Jargon: The bottom line is that our output is not within our game plan.

Clear: Production is not on schedule.

Jargon: I'm having conceptual difficulty with these academic queries.

Clear: I don't understand these review questions.

Jargon: Pursuant to our conversation, I have forwarded you a remittance attached herewith.

Clear: As we discussed, I am mailing you the check.

■ Fresh and Original Writing

Clichés are overused words or phrases. They give the reader no fresh view and no concrete picture. Because clichés spring quickly to mind (for both the writer and the reader), they are easy to write and often remain unedited.

an axe to grind	piece of cake
as good as dead	planting the seed
beat around the bush	rearing its ugly head
between a rock and a hard place	stick your neck out
burning bridges	throwing your weight around
easy as pie	up a creek

■ Purpose and Voice

Other aspects of your writing may also be tired and overworked. Be alert to the two types of clichés described below.

Clichés of Purpose:

- Sentimental papers gushing about an ideal friend or family member, or droning on about a moving experience
- Overused topics with recycled information and predictable examples

Clichés of Voice:

- Writing that assumes a false sense of authority: "I have determined that there are three basic types of newspapers. My preference is for the third."
- Writing that speaks with little or no sense of authority: "I flipped when I saw *Viewpoints*."
- Writing that is pretentious: "Because I have researched the topic thoroughly, readers should not question my conclusion."

Change biased words. ■■■

When depicting individuals or groups according to their differences, use language that implies equal value and respect for all people.

■ Words Referring to Ethnicity

ACCEPTABLE GENERAL TERMS

American Indians,
Native Americans

Asian Americans
(not Orientals)

Latinos, Latinas,
Hispanics

African Americans, blacks

"African American" has come into wide acceptance, though the term "black" is preferred by some individuals.

Anglo Americans (English ancestry), European Americans

Use these terms to avoid the notion that "American," used alone, means "white."

ACCEPTABLE SPECIFIC TERMS

Cherokee people, Inuit people, and so forth

Chinese Americans, Japanese
Americans, and so forth

Mexican Americans, Cubans
Americans, and so forth

Additional References

NOT RECOMMENDED

Eurasian, mulatto

nonwhite

Caucasian

American (to mean U.S. citizen)

PREFERRED

person of mixed ancestry

person of color

white

U.S. citizen

■ Words Referring to Age

AGE GROUP

up to age 13 or 14

between 13 and 19

late teens and 20s

30s to age 60

60 and older

65 and older

ACCEPTABLE TERMS

boys, girls

youth, young people, young men,
young women

young adults, young women,
young men

adults, men, women

older adults, older people (not elderly)

seniors (senior citizens also acceptable)

INSIGHT: Whenever you write about a person with a disability, an impairment, or other special condition, give the person and your readers the utmost respect. Nothing is more distracting to a reader than an insensitive or outdated reference.

■ Words Referring to Disabilities or Impairments

In the recent past, some writers were choosing alternatives to the term *disabled*, including *physically challenged*, *exceptional*, or *special*. However, it is not generally held that these new terms are precise enough to serve those who live with disabilities. Of course, degrading labels such as *crippled*, *invalid*, and *maimed*, as well as overly negative terminology, must be avoided.

NOT RECOMMENDED

handicapped
birth defect
stutter, stammer, lisp
an AIDS victim
suffering from cancer
mechanical foot
false teeth

PREFERRED

disabled
congenital disability
speech impairment
person with AIDS
person who has cancer
prosthetic foot
dentures

■ Words Referring to Conditions

People with various disabilities and conditions have sometimes been referred to as though they were their condition (quadriplegics, depressives, epileptics) instead of people who happen to have a particular disability. As much as possible, remember to refer to the person first, the disability second.

NOT RECOMMENDED

the disabled
cripples
the retarded
dyslexics
neurotics
subjects, cases
quadriplegics
wheelchair users

PREFERRED

people with disabilities
people who have difficulty walking
people with a developmental disability
students with dyslexia
patients with neuroses
participants, patients
people who are quadriplegic
people who use wheelchairs

■ Additional Terms

Make sure you understand the following terms that address specific impairments:

hearing impairment	=	partial hearing loss, hard of hearing (not deaf, which is total loss of hearing)
visual impairment	=	partially sighted (not blind, which is total loss of vision)
communicative disorder	=	speech, hearing, and learning disabilities affecting communication

■ Words Referring to Gender

- Use parallel language for both sexes:

The men and the women rebuilt the school together.
Hank and Marie
Mr. Robert Gumble, Mrs. Joy Gumble

Note: The courtesy titles *Mr.*, *Ms.*, *Mrs.*, and *Miss* ought to be used according to the person's preference.

- Use nonsexist alternatives to words with masculine connotations:

humanity (not *mankind*) synthetic (not *man-made*)
artisan (not *craftsman*)

- Do not use masculine-only or feminine-only pronouns (*he*, *she*, *his*, *her*) when you want to refer to a human being in general:

A politician can kiss privacy good-bye when he runs for office.
(not recommended)

Instead, use *he* or *she*, change the sentence to plural, or eliminate the pronoun:

A politician can kiss privacy good-bye when he or she runs for office.
Politicians can kiss privacy good-bye when they run for office.
A politician can kiss privacy good-bye when running for office.

- Do not use gender-specific references in the salutation of a business letter when you don't know the person's name:

Dear Sir: Dear Gentlemen: (neither is recommended)

Instead, address a position:

Dear Personnel Officer:
Dear Members of the Economic Committee:

■ Occupational Issues

NOT RECOMMENDED

chairman
salesman
clergyman
male/female nurse
male/female doctor
mailman
insurance man
fireman
businessman
congressman
steward, stewardess
policeman, policewoman

PREFERRED

chair, presiding officer, moderator
sales representative, salesperson
minister, priest, rabbi
nurse
doctor, physician
mail carrier, postal worker, letter carrier
insurance agent
firefighter
executive, manager, businessperson
member of Congress, representative, senator
flight attendant
police officer

■ Proofreading Your Writing

The following guidelines will help you check your revised writing for spelling, mechanics, usage, grammar, and form.

Review punctuation and mechanics. ■ ■ ■

1. **Check for proper use of commas** before coordinating conjunctions in compound sentences, after introductory clauses and long introductory phrases, between items in a series, and so on.
2. **Look for apostrophes** in contractions, plurals, and possessive nouns.
3. **Examine quotation marks** in quoted information, titles, or dialogue.
4. **Watch for proper use of capital letters** for first words in written conversation and for proper names of people, places, and things.

Look for usage and grammar errors. ■ ■ ■

1. **Look for words that writers commonly misuse:** *there/their/they're; accept/except.*
2. **Check for verb use.** Subjects and verbs should agree in number: Singular subjects go with singular verbs; plural subjects go with plural verbs. Verb tenses should be consistent throughout.
3. **Review for pronoun/antecedent agreement problems.** A pronoun and its antecedent must agree in number.

Check for spelling errors. ■ ■ ■

1. **Use a spell checker.** Your spell checker will catch most errors.
2. **Check each spelling you are unsure of.** Especially check those proper names and other special words your spell checker won't know.
3. **Consult a handbook.** Refer to a list of commonly misspelled words, as well as an up-to-date dictionary.

Check the writing for form and presentation. ■ ■ ■

1. **Note the title.** A title should be appropriate and lead into the writing.
2. **Examine any quoted or cited material.** Are all sources of information properly presented and documented? (See pages 491–528 and 529–558.)
3. **Look over the finished copy of your writing.** Does it meet the requirements for a final manuscript? (See page 130.)