



# Proofreading, Editing, and Revising

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Once a rough draft is finished, we can set it aside for at least a day; this is the first step in proofreading a paper. Because we set the paper aside, we can then come back to the paper with a fresh mind and thus more easily catch the errors in it. We also bring a fresh mind to the process of polishing a paper. Proofreading and editing a paper involve several processes that can be summarized into some rules. While at first it may be difficult to do all these things, with practice, they can be accomplished.

1. **READ THE PAPER ALOUD.** If we read the paper aloud slowly, we have two senses--the eyes AND the ears--working for us. Thus, what one sense misses, the other may pick up.
2. **CHECK FOR GRAMMATICAL AND MECHANICAL ERRORS.** Are marks of punctuation where they should be? Are all words spelled correctly? (Try double-checking your spelling by spelling the word backward.) Are pronoun reference and subject-verb agreement consistent? Be sure to check any time you have doubts.
3. **CHECK THE THESIS STATEMENT.** Does it accurately state your main idea? Is it in fact supported by the paper? Does it need to be changed in any way?
4. **CHECK THE PAPER'S DEVELOPMENT.** Are there sufficient details? Is the logic valid?
5. **CHECK THE PAPER'S COHERENCE AND UNITY.** Are the major points connected? Are the relationships between them expressed clearly? Do they all relate to the thesis?
- \*\*6. **MAKE YOUR OWN LIST OF THE ERRORS YOU MOST OFTEN MAKE AND READ THE PAPER THROUGH ONE TIME EACH FOR THAT PARTICULAR ERROR.** Thus, if your two most frequent errors are punctuation and spelling, you will read through the paper once for spelling alone, and once for punctuation alone, before going on to complete your proofreading for other errors.
- \*\*7. **REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE WRITING FOR OTHERS.** No matter how familiar they may be with the material, they cannot "get inside" your head and understand your approach to it unless you express yourself clearly. Therefore, it is useful to read the paper through once as you bear in mind whether or not the student or teacher or friend who will be reading it will understand what you are saying. That is, have you said exactly what you wanted to?

These rules cover the general and most basic ones of proofreading. Once you have checked your paper for these items, though, you will want to concern yourself with matters of style--that is, how you have expressed your ideas. The following rules and examples are ones that every effective writer keeps in

mind.

**1. RECHECK YOUR WRITING FOR ABSTRACT SUBJECTS, PARTICULARLY THOSE YOU HAVE COMBINED WITH PASSIVE VERBS.** Try substituting concrete or personal subjects with active verbs.

Original: More attractiveness is sometimes given an act when it is made illegal.

Revision: When an act becomes illegal, some people find it more attractive.

**2. CUT OUT WORDINESS WHEREVER POSSIBLE: IF YOU CAN CUT A WORD OUT, DO SO.**

Original: They are desirous of ...

Revision: They want ...

**3. USE ACTIVE VERBS.** Since verbs tend to carry the meaning of your sentences, use the most precise and active ones possible. Thus, avoid constructions using the various forms of the verb "to be."

Original: Inflation is a threat to our economy. Revision: Inflation threatens our economy.

**4. UNLESS USING THE CONSTRUCTION FOR EMPHASIS, AVOID STRETCHER PHRASES SUCH AS IT IS AND THERE ARE.** Again, remember the need for strong verbs.

Original: There were several reasons for the United States' entrance into the war.

Revision: The United States entered the war for several reasons.

**5. REPLACE COLLOQUIALISMS WITH FRESH AND MORE PRECISE STATEMENTS.**

Because colloquialisms tend to be used so often, they also are not very precise in meaning. A hassle, for example, can be an annoyance, an argument, or a physical fight.

Original: Her behavior flipped me out.

Revision: Her behavior first stunned, then delighted me.

**6. REVIEW YOUR SENTENCES.** Be sure that no parts of the paper are "short and choppy"; be sure that the rhythm of your paper is not interrupted, except for a good reason, like emphasis. A good way of smoothing out such a problem is to try combining sentences, and in so doing showing the relationship between them.

Original: The best show in terms of creating a tense atmosphere is "Let's Make a Deal." This is probably the most famous of all games shows.

Revision: The best show in terms of creating a tense atmosphere is "Let's Make a Deal," which is also probably the most famous of all game shows.

**7. REVIEW YOUR DICTION.** Again, remember that others are reading your paper and that even the

choice of one word can affect their response. Thus, try to anticipate their response, and choose your words accordingly.

Original: The media's exploitation of the Watergate scandal showed how biased it was already.

Revision: The media's coverage of the Watergate scandal suggests that perhaps those in the media had already determined Nixon's guilt.\*

**Note that in addition to being more specific, the revision does not force the reader to defend the media. In the first example, though, the statement is so exaggerated that even the reader who is neutral on the issue may feel it necessary to defend the media. Thus, the writer of the original has made his job of persuading the reader that much harder.**

## PROOFREADING, EDITING AND REVISING

Practice your proofreading, editing, and revising skills with the following exercises.

1. Once upon a time there were three little pigs. Each were in need of a house. Two of the pigs, were very lazy, built houses made of straw and wood, these houses were not strong. The third pig, who was really into building houses built a brick structure. One day a big bad wolf came along. The brick house of the third pig was were the two pigs ran. The wolf followed them there. He tried to blow down the third house. He Couldn't. So he climbed down the chimney and landed in a pot of hot water, that was the end of the wolf.

2. There are two reasons we should support the prohibition of the sale of handguns. The first is that, since murderous handguns are used solely to sap people, they are not needed by anyone for sport or game hunting. In fact, they are not used by anyone interested in recreation. And handguns are responsible For the deaths of many, how would you feel if a loved once were killed by handgun? The second reason is that when the number of handguns is reduced, the number of killings decrease. They tried this in Baltimore. It worked.

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