

**ACADEMIC LANGUAGE AND LEARNING SUCCESS PROGRAM**

# Editing and Proofreading Skills

## Aim

To develop the skills of editing and proof-reading, and more importantly to gain understanding of the value of putting aside time to address these processes.

Editing and proofreading, although clearly related, are not the same thing. Editing is a broader process concerned with content, clarity and logic of argument, structure and style. Proofreading, on the other hand, is a 'micro' process in which you are not looking at content, but rather the mechanics of the essay, such as spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors.

## Tips for Editing and Proofreading

- Leave enough time to gain some distance from your paper. If you try to edit or proofread immediately after writing, you are likely to actually 'read' what you think you wrote rather than what is on the page. If you've been organised enough through the research and writing phase, you should have plenty of time to set the paper aside for a day or two before the first edit.
- Decide whether you edit and proofread best on screen or on paper and then stick to that.
- Work somewhere quiet and uninterrupted. When editing, you will need to be seeing the overall picture you've constructed, and when proofreading, you'll be focusing on minute details that could be easily missed if you're distracted.

## Editing

It's better to edit before you proofread. Ideally, you will begin editing as you're still writing your paper. However, when you have 'finished' writing, take a day or two off and return to the paper with fresh eyes and consider the big issues in content and structure. Don't fall into the trap of proofreading for detail at this stage

### • **Content**

- Is your thesis statement (your point of view) clear and does it logically respond to the topic?
- Do you have clear arguments, details, and/or examples to support your thesis?
- Have you used compelling evidence to support your arguments and cited it appropriately?
- Are there any gaps in logic or absences in your argument?
- Read again your conclusion and make sure it provides a comprehensive overview of your thesis, restates its validity, and summarizes the outcome of your analyses.
- Do you have too much description, and not enough analysis? (It is usually not enough simply to outline what you have read. You need to evaluate the ideas, compare them with those of other writers, and examine issues and perspectives critically.)
- Check that you do not have too many direct quotes. (Whilst it is important to refer to other writers in academic writing, it is also important not to rely too heavily on their words. **Paraphrase much more than you quote.** Only use a direct quote if it is **particularly** well-expressed or the ideas are **particularly** significant, as with a definition for example. Appropriate quotes used sparingly can greatly improve your writing, but using too many quotes, especially if they are not well chosen, will detract from your writing, and you will definitely lose marks.)

- **Structure**

- Does the introduction include your thesis statement and primary arguments?
- Do your arguments follow a logical sequence, perhaps building on each other throughout the paper?
- Is your evidence clearly linked to arguments in the same paragraphs?
- Are your paragraphs coherent with a single main idea in each?
- Do you have a clear conclusion that doesn't introduce any new arguments, and therefore has no referencing?
- Polish your linking sentences – make sure they provide a smooth closure to the current paragraph while relaying the topic of the subsequent paragraph;
- Can you improve the quality of topic sentences?
- Make sure the Introduction outlines, in the same order, the content that the Body actually contains.

- **Clarity**

- Have you defined your keywords?
- Have you chosen the most meaningful words to express your ideas?
- Is it clear what each pronoun (he, she, it, they, which, who, this, etc.) refers to?

- **Style**

- Is the tone of your paper appropriate and consistent? (e.g. formal or informal, persuasive or descriptive)
- Is your language gender-sensitive, free of stereotypes and free of emotive expressions?
- Have you varied the length of your sentences, and is there a mix of active and passive voice?
- Have you checked for unnecessary wordiness? (e.g. "Due to the fact that..." becomes "As..." or "Because...")

- **Citations**

- Have you acknowledged your sources and used your unit's preferred referencing style?
- When you've paraphrased, are your words/structures sufficiently different from the original yet with the same meaning? Have you cited your source?
- Have you used quality sources?
- Check your citations and make sure all references follow the guidelines of the nominated style.
- Check that your reference list only has the sources that are cited in the body of your essay, none others. Make sure they're all on the reference list. Make sure the reference list is in alphabetical order, according to surname.

Modified from <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/proofread.html>

Modified from: <http://www.monash.edu.au/lis/lonline/writing/general/academic/7.xml>



## Editing activities

### 1. Does the following paragraph have a topic sentence? Circle yes/no

No longer is a campaigner required to doorknock the households of an electorate in order to secure votes. Party members and loyal voters can be reached via email and e-newsletters, while swinging voters can be targeted using on-line campaigns. According to Webster (2008), a high proportion of voters living in Northern Territory marginal seats shun the mass television and print media campaigning undertaken by some parties, preferring to base opinions on information gathered from sponsored links, blogs and incidental advertising on websites.

### 2. How many topics does the following paragraph have?

The Road is one of the great fundamental institutions of mankind. Not only is the Road one of the great human institutions because it is fundamental to social existence, but also because its varied effects appear in every department of the State. It is the Road which determines the sites of many cities and the growth and nourishment of all. The road also controls the development of strategies and fixes the sites of battles. It gives its framework to all economic development. It is the Road which is the channel of all trade, and, what is more important, of all ideas. In its most humble function it is a necessary guide without which progress from place to place would be a ceaseless experiment; it is a sustenance without which organized society would be impossible, thus the Road moves and controls all history. Civic buildings are also important in a city. They give it character and reflect its history. They also reflect the prosperity or otherwise of the area.

Modified from <http://www.english-for-students.com/Paragraph.html>

### 3. The following sentences are too wordy. How could you change them to shorten them?

- I. It is important for persons to read the notes, advice and information detailed opposite and then complete all sections of the form prior to its immediate return to the agency via the envelope provided.
- II. High-quality learning environments are a necessary precondition for facilitation and enhancement of the ongoing learning process.

## Proof reading

When you are editing an early draft, you do not want to be bothered with thinking about punctuation, grammar, and spelling. If you are worrying about the spelling of a word or the placement of a comma, you are not focusing on the more important task of developing and connecting ideas. Having finished the editing, it's now time to proof-read.

Proofreading is the final stage of the editing process, focusing on surface errors such as misspellings and mistakes in grammar and punctuation.

Why proofread? It's the content that really matters, right?

Content is important. But like it or not, the way a paper looks affects the way others judge it. When you've worked hard to develop and present your ideas, you don't want careless errors distracting your reader from what you have to say. It's worth paying attention to the details that help you make a good impression.



### Here are a few tips for effective proofreading:

- ✓ Use the spell check and grammar check in your word processing application (e.g. Microsoft Word), but don't rely on this tool. Always double check the suggestions. The computer cannot (yet?) replace the human's appreciation of idiom and style.
- ✓ Word processing tools often allow you to look up meanings and/or synonyms when you find you are repeating words too often. Highlight the word, right-click, select Look up or synonyms.
- ✓ Read through the paper slowly. Actually pause at each full stop in order to ensure you have made meaning of each sentence. Concentrate on just one sentence at a time. In this way, you will avoid getting confused by the flow of what you meant to say.
- ✓ Reading out loud can also help you identify where there is an error such as missing articles or the wrong word. If you find that you are stumbling as you are reading, it is likely there is an error in your written expression. The rule is to read it exactly as you have written it! It is very easy to just add or correct the missing words and punctuation as if they were there; be strict with yourself. Read your essay aloud to check punctuation. Natural pauses within a sentence may require a comma.
  - Do not use contractions. Use the full words, for example, 'don't' becomes 'do not'.
  - Use academic written English, not spoken English.
  - Avoid slang or colloquial language and idioms.
- ✓ Keep a dictionary by your side to check both spelling and meaning if you have any doubts.
- ✓ Replace colloquialisms such as "Freud was spot on with his theory of the Oedipal complex..." with "Freud's compelling theory of the Oedipal complex..."
- ✓ ¶ is your friend. Click the ¶ (*see-formatting function*) on the toolbar to see if you've hit the space bar too many times between words or have pressed enter when you shouldn't have.
- ✓ Identify and get rid of repetitions – use a variety of linking phrases, remove unnecessary adverbs and adjectives, revise and vary your word choice – consult relevant dictionaries about words you often misspell or repeat;

### And more...

#### Look for punctuation errors:

Take special care with sentences spliced together with a comma

*The appearance of health is poor, the patient displays signs of a rash, the pulse is slow, with a history of addiction.*

#### Look for where you may need to place a comma:

During the operation, the patient died.

dependent clause + independent clause

#### Check subject verb agreement:

A good nurse give support to patients' families.

I give	We give
You give	They give
He/she/it gives	

#### Avoid repetition

*The patient will be feeling **sick**. The **sick** patient will need a **bed**. The **bed** will ideally be in a ward devoted to that patient's particular **sickness**.*

#### Find synonyms

Sick ill unwell ailing

**Use a variety of linking phrases:**

How could you change the sentences below?

*However, there may be no beds available. However, a patient may be suddenly discharged. However, a more needy patient may arrive unexpectedly. However, ....*

**Remove unnecessary adverbs and adjectives**

very big = large

extremely large = enormous

an incredibly sick, chronically ill patient = a chronically ill patient

**Make sure you use accurate signposting**

- Just as you use signs to navigate a road, the reader uses signposts to navigate your writing. If you don't provide any signposts, or use them incorrectly, the reader will easily get lost. E.g.

**Adding information**

- Also,
- Furthermore,
- In addition,

**Referring back**

- Despite this,
- Due to this
- In regard to this,
- Having said that,

**Contrasting ideas**

- However,
- On the other hand
- Alternatively

### Essay and Page Layout

	Are you within the word count?
	Your typing should go automatically to the end of each line, unless the next sentence starts a new paragraph. In that case, do two 'enters' so there is a white space between paragraphs.
	Use 1.5 line spacing, unless your lecturer says otherwise.
	Have you used the font type and size that your lecturer asked for?

### Sentences, Clauses & Punctuation

	Each sentence and name must begin with a capital letter.
	Each <i>dependent</i> clause must be connected to an independent clause to complete its meaning. (A dependent clause doesn't make sense alone.)
	Every sentence ends with a full-stop.
	Every sentence must have a verb and a subject.
	Check the length of your sentences. If it's more than 2.5 to 3 lines, then it's too long and can become convoluted, and difficult to follow. See where you can divide it. On the other hand, too many short, choppy sentences are child-like writing. See where you can join them with a conjunction.
	Don't join two sentences with a comma. Either use a conjunction after the comma, or make it into two sentences by using a full stop.

### Verbs

	Do all verbs use the correct tense for your meaning?
	Past participles alone are not verbs. All past participles (eaten, gone, etc.) are used with the verb <i>to be</i> or <i>to have</i> in front of them. Words ending with ...ing are not verbs unless they have the verb <i>to be</i> in front of them.
	Present-tense verbs (or auxiliaries) for singular, third-person subjects (he, she, Mr. Smith, the company, CDU etc.) ends with an "s." This is called subject-verb agreement. A singular subject must have a singular verb; a plural subject, a plural verb.

### Articles

	Singular articles (a/an) are not used with plural or non-count nouns
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### Pronouns

	Pronouns agree in singular or plural with the nouns they represent. For example, "Australians tend to be individualistic. <i>They</i> often like to do things alone". 'Australians' is plural, therefore the plural <i>they</i> must be used.
	Each pronoun you use is clearly related to a noun or nouns that come before it. i.e. when you read 'they' above, you have to be able to find the noun that it refers to close before it.

### Words and Word Forms

	Use full words instead of contractions. i.e. <i>is not</i> instead of <i>isn't</i>
	Have you repeated the same word many times? If so, find a 'synonym' for it.

**Proof-reading practice exercise:**

Proof-read the following sentences. Find and correct grammatical, punctuation and other errors.

1. Its a difficult problem to solve.
2. Your the hardest working student in the group.
3. As a researcher he is outstanding, as a teacher he is a poor communicator.
4. The Principle of the school first got there attention before he talked to them about the affects, on the school's reputation, of poor behaviour in public.
5. The dog Ben belongs to my friend Tim who slobbers alot.
6. Apple produce the better computers then IBM.
7. PowerPoint software is produced by Microsoft. It is vary useful as it provides many option.
8. The range of format templates are particular impressive.
9. I tried to teach EXCEL to students years ago. Who were doing a Graduate Diploma. They cheated by hand calculating each cells to avoid learning how to use formula.
10. Toms mother gave him a choice of the last two pieces of fruit. He chose an apple rather than banana because it fit better in lunchbox.
11. The problem, with the students writing is, that they are not understanding use of commas.
12. This new software is very exciting because it can be operated by voice for handicapped clients. It was developed in close partnership with experts on the needs of those with relevant disability. The marketing Division is frustrated by the companies refusal to allow it to be adapted for PC.

Modified from <http://www.courseworks.unimelb.edu.au/researchandwriting/editingandproofreading.php>  
Modified from: Dr Greg Maguire, Academic Writing Consultant, Faculties of CH&S and B&L, ECU

Using the two processes of editing and proof-reading can make all the difference to your final product... and your marks. Editing skills can take time and practise to develop fully. The effort is well worth it and will show in the quality of your writing.

Answers:

1. It's a difficult problem to solve.
2. You're the hardest working student in the group.
3. As a researcher he is outstanding but as a teacher he is a poor communicator.
4. The Principal of the school first got their attention before he talked to them about the effects on the school's reputation of poor behaviour in public.
5. The dog Ben, who slobbers a lot, belongs to my friend Tim.
6. Apple produces better computers than IBM.
7. PowerPoint software is produced by Microsoft. It is very useful as it provides many options.
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