



Editing Tips

A-State Online Writing Center

Great writers develop an eye for editing their papers. These edits look at sentences, organization, grammatic errors, source integration, word choice, and overall text presentation. While it may seem daunting, there are many tips left by writers of the past to create better writers for the future. Let's see how each one can build these amazing writing habits.

- 1. Rest.** Whether you have time to take an hour nap or get a full night's rest, this period of rest will allow you to separate yourself from your text. Because you have stared at your paper and taken in all this text as you are writing it, rereading it after you've written your last sentence causes you to miss some of the mistakes you would catch if you spent some time away from it.
- 2. Grab a friend.** Once you have finished, grab a friend, writing tutor, or a trusty dormmate and have them read over it. They have a fresh set of eyes that can catch those mistakes quicker or tell you if something doesn't sound quite right. This method is called a reader's perspective, and it shows how the audience is going to perceive your writing.
- 3. Always read it out loud.** This is, hands down, one of the best editing tips. When reading it out loud, you will hear the places you make mistakes, find typos, discover where your sentences may be too wordy, or places to review and correct your word choice. The places where you stumble

through your sentence or have to go back through and start your sentence over again are typically the places where these mistakes live.

- 4. Check your style.** Our Online Writing Center has guides on formatting APA, MLA, and Chicago style papers, which are the most used styles in academia. Check your prompt to see what style and edition your professor requires. Open up the appropriate guide before you begin your paper, and you can follow the guide on how it should be formatted.
- 5. Find the best editing format.** Some people prefer to edit straight from their computer or laptop; others prefer to print it out, highlight it, and mark it up. Find the one that allows you to move through your editing process the easiest and use that. (This is also an excellent tip for analyzing research).
- 6. Draft freely.** Avoid drafting and editing at the same time. Your first draft will have some mistakes, but it's good to throw all of your ideas onto paper. After you complete your draft, move on to editing and clean it up.
- 7. Don't stress yourself with overediting.** A good artist knows when to put the paintbrush down and acknowledge their work is complete, but they also know doing too much could ruin it. Likewise, a good writer knows when to quit editing their paper, walk away, and rest knowing they used their best writing tools to build a solid text.
- 8. Reading:** When you buy a class text, look at how the writing is structured, how the author crafts their arguments, how they utilize their resources, and how they organized the paper. Use highlighters in varying colors to show where they do these things in their work. (Pro tip: this is also a great tool for research and learning how to incorporate quotes from research into your work.

- 9. Avoid repeating mistakes.** If you find one grammar issue within your paper, assume that you've made the same mistake throughout the rest of the paper. Write it down when you discover the first mistake and look for that same mistake in the entire text.
- 10. Start from the bottom.** Most texts are read from top to bottom, but if we displace that, we can find more mistakes. Read your conclusion first and work your way up through the paragraphs instead of down. Since it is so distant, the errors are easier to catch.
- 11. Global vs. local issues:** Global issues deal with your organization, how your text reads, or how you build your argument. Local issues deal with spelling, grammar, word choice, and sentence structure. Edit your paper for the global issues first because they're the most important. Then move on to your local issues since they make up the smallest details.
- 12. Focus on your introduction and conclusion.** Your introduction should pull your reader in and draw their attention. How are you choosing to do this in your paper? Highlight that and your thesis. The conclusion should be the "mic drop" at the end of your paper. Did you wrap it up well? Does the end of your text impact your reader in some way? Does it make them want to take action?
- 13. Introduce additional research.** If you feel your paper lacks the ethos needed to make it strong, find more research to add a point or make one of the existing points stronger. Doing this may take a bit more time, but you will deliver a stronger text.
- 14. Think of your text as a spine.** Make sure your paper holds up. It should be straight, organized, and connected.
- 15. Cut unnecessary text.** Don't let the word count requirement scare you. If the section of text doesn't work, then cut it. You can make up for that word count when you rewrite to make your point stronger.

- 16. Carefully select your evidence.** Many students we encounter don't read the entire resource but look for quotes to directly supplement the text. The argument becomes weak because the quote is taken out of context, or the quote appears to be shoved in the middle of the paragraph; this is usually done to appease the professor's resource requirement. Read your research, select quotes that will benefit your argument while holding true to the context of the work they were taken from, and look at the ways other authors intertwine their work with their research.
- 17. Avoid wordiness and redundancy.** Choose your words carefully and challenge yourself to avoid using the same word over and over to describe something; this also applies to the redundancy of ideas. Avoid stating the same point multiple times in one paragraph.
- 18. Remove or contain your fluff.** Some students fluff up their text to sound more academic, and others do it to raise their word count. Regardless of the reason, get rid of it or find a way to use a minimal amount. Academia isn't a bakery, and instructors don't want it sugar-coated. It will make the text much easier for your reader to move through.
- 19. Avoid making your sentences more than 15-20 words.** Have you ever witnessed a hard to read PowerPoint presentation because there is too much text on the slide? The same logic applies to your sentences. You want them to be long enough to connect your ideas and create a good flow, but not so long that it becomes hard on your audience.
- 20. Check your tense.** Pick a tense and stick with it. Whether it be past or present, staying in one tense is quite a feat for most students. Work on this by writing a paragraph in past tense, then rewrite it to be in present tense.
- 21. Use jargon sparingly.** This is mostly audience-based. Who are you hoping this text will address? Would they understand the jargon you are using, or is it specific to your discipline?

- 22. Utilize strong nouns.** Don't generalize nouns in your text. Instead, be descriptive, so your reader knows exactly what you're saying. The more specific you can be, the better chance you have at the reader retaining the information you produce and showing interest throughout the entire text.
- 23. Avoid passive voice.** Active voice naturally uses less wording; this will help the reader move through your text and make the subject of your ideas clearer. Active voice lists the subject, the action, and the receiver of that action. Passive voice lists the receiver of the action, the verb, and then the subject; this writing is more awkward and tends to confuse the reader.
- 24. Review your punctuation.** Should that comma be there? Would a semicolon connect your ideas better in that one sentence? Punctuation matters, and, more often than not, those are the first rules we forget from middle school.
- 25. Double-check your references.** Are you sure that is how you cite your E-Book? Is this how you cite an image from the internet or textbook? Our writing center has resources to check those and, if you can't find it there, other writing centers will have them.