

# HOW TO EDIT

Editing is a major step in the writing process, essential to the success of an essay. Failure to edit is sure to reduce your grades even if the content of your work is good.

After producing a rough draft of your essay, you must—thoroughly and patiently—improve and correct it, looking at every aspect, from the overall structure and the organization of paragraphs right down to apostrophes, commas, and capitals.

Editing should not be confused with proofreading; these are two different steps.

To begin:

- Write or print out a double-spaced rough draft.
- Work at a desk with a dictionary and a grammar handbook for reference.

1) Revise the essay looking at content and structure:

- Check the introduction: Is it clear and complete?
- Examine your thesis statement: Is it prominent and perfectly clear?
- Check the sequence of body paragraphs: Are they arranged in the most effective order?
- Look at each topic sentence: Does each one establish the paragraph's overall point?
- Skim each paragraph: Does each one develop its point well without irrelevant content?
- Check the content of the conclusion: Does it follow from your thesis? Is it developed well?

If you have made many changes, prepare a clean copy—a second draft with all revisions in place.

2) Now edit the essay for correct, effective English. Read so that you hear each sentence in your mind, and *listen* for errors. Go slowly, sentence by sentence, reading *exactly what is written*.

- Look for faults in grammar and punctuation
- Look for run-on sentences and sentence fragments
- Rewrite any sentences that seem awkward or ungrammatical
- Eliminate wordiness, redundancies, and repetition; edit out unnecessary words
- Add transitional words or phrases to make smoother links between points
- Reconsider your choice of words; look for clearer, more specific terms
- Use a dictionary to check the meaning of any word that you are not absolutely sure of
- Look carefully for usage errors (e.g. *there* for *their*, *than* for *then*, *loose* for *lose*)
- Check the mechanics—capitalization, hyphens, quotation marks, italics, etc.

3) Read the essay with your corrections, checking its clarity and 'flow.' Make final adjustments, and then type your good copy with attention to proper spacing and formatting.

4) Finally, proofread your essay carefully, checking for typographical errors and similar faults.

## ADDITIONAL EDITING TIPS

**ALLOW TIME FOR EDITING:** When scheduling your work on an essay, include time for editing; a last-minute rush can cause you to submit a rough draft filled with errors.

**EDIT ON PAPER:** It is difficult to edit effectively on a computer screen; print out a double-spaced draft and work on it with a pen or pencil. Double spacing allows room for corrections and revisions.

**READ ALOUD WHEN POSSIBLE:** When editing, read your work out loud, and read it *exactly* as it is written. This way, you will *hear* your faults in grammar, punctuation, and phrasing.

**USE A POINTER:** Use a pen or pencil tip as a pointer, running it just below each line of print as you read. This will help to focus your attention and allow you to catch errors.

**USE A DICTIONARY:** Each time you look up a word to check the definition or spelling you learn more about that word (its roots, its alternate meanings, etc.). This is how we develop knowledge of the language.

**DON'T RELY ON 'GRAMMAR-CHECK' SYSTEMS:** They are simply not reliable.

**DON'T RELY ON 'SPELL-CHECK' SYSTEMS:** They indicate only that a word exists—not that it is the *right* word for your context. These systems can leave an essay filled with errors in word usage.

**DON'T MISUSE A THESAURUS:** Most synonyms differ in usage and connotation, even if their basic meanings are similar. Never take words from a thesaurus without ensuring that they fit your context.

**REMEMBER: PLAIN ENGLISH IS GOOD ENGLISH:** In editing, clarity is the goal. When you find a problem, it can often be solved by simplifying the wording or the sentence structure. If a sentence seems long and awkward, try dividing it into two simpler sentences.

**ALWAYS PROOFREAD:** Don't neglect this final check for typing mistakes and similar errors. It usually takes only a few minutes. Proofread *everything*, including headings or title page, bibliography, etc.

## THE ULTIMATE BENEFITS

Editing is a learning experience. If you neglect it, you are losing one of your best opportunities to develop the communication skills that are essential to success in college, university, and the workplace.