

Editing Strategies and Questions

Congratulations! You're almost done. Now it's time to polish your writing. The hard work is done. Now you get to tighten sentences and paragraphs, make sure each word is the best one for your purpose, and check your grammar and punctuation.

Here are some strategies that can help with this:

1. As you move from sentence to sentence in paragraphs or from one paragraph to the next, make sure you are echoing words or phrases to develop coherence and "flow."
2. Look for places where you can use patterns or repetitions to emphasize meaning and provide rhythm.
3. Check your sentences. Are the subject and verb (the basic statement) of each independent clause next to each other?
4. Check your sentences. Are the subject and verb (the basic statement) of most independent clauses near the start of the clause, with modifying elements branching to the right?
5. Check your sentences. Are the subject and verb (the basic statement) of most independent clauses strong and concrete? Have you successfully avoided using forms of "to be" – is, are, was, were, etc. – whenever possible?
6. Have you kept your vocabulary and punctuation simple? In other words, are you using words you know, and punctuation you know, and using them in the proper way?
7. Have you read the draft aloud? You'll be amazed at what you hear and don't hear.
8. Have you read the draft aloud, backwards? You'll be amazed at what you hear and don't hear.

As you employ the strategies above, don't forget to ask yourself these 10 questions:

1. Do you use active verbs wherever you can? (Do you "decide" rather than "make a decision"?)
2. Have you cut all the dead wood from your sentences? ("It is interesting to note that editing is fun")
3. Do you have a good reason for using passive constructions? If not, make them active. ("The liquid was poured into the test tube by the chemist.")
4. Can you use a smaller word where you have used a big one? ("Can you utilize this tool?")
5. Have you used the most precise word or term you can? (Will your audience understand it?)
6. Do you find any clichés in your sentences? ("Can you cut through the red tape and get on the ball"?)
7. Can you combine sentences to avoid repetition? ("The water is brown. It is flowing fast. It is polluted.")
8. Are your paragraphs short and focused?
9. If appropriate, are your references, documentation, and calculations complete and precise?
10. Have you proofread the piece for punctuation, spelling, and typos?

References

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