

Final Editing and Proofing

Now you're ready to review your manuscript with the "fine-tooth comb," examining it for correctness and accuracy. The following gives you several considerations for this final stage. Don't be complacent here and think that you've made all the corrections. Writing is fraught with human imperfection. Ideas for proceeding: some writers find reading their work aloud helps find errors.

Others read their papers backwards in examining for correctness. Still others find it best to have a new eye (another person) make this final review. Here are a few suggestions for both final editing and proofreading:

Editing

Wording: Are your words well chosen and effective? You've infused your writing with effective verbs and concrete nouns, avoiding heavy pronoun usage and prepositional phrases.

Style: Have you read your work editing for voice and style? Is your tone consistent?

Grammar: Are your sentences and their parts (subject-verb agreement) correct? Have you checked for fragments? Each sentence has a subject and a verb.

Pronoun Reference: Have you checked that pronouns match the antecedent in number and gender?

Format: Are your margins correct? Is your text double-spaced? Are your citations done correctly?

Proofreading

Spelling: Have you used spell-check and re-read attentively for errors with homophones?

Punctuation: Do you need to add, correct or delete any marks? Have you checked that you've used apostrophes correctly?

Missing Words: Have you left out any words?

Mechanics: Have you checked capitalization, italics, etc.?

Minor Errors: Have you scanned the paper for minor errors in spacing, lettering, etc.?

As you go through your work, here are a few reminders and examples of common problems to look for:

Omit Needless Words

A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences.

- Beware of redundancy.
- Avoid passive voice. Whenever possible, use verb forms in which the subject does the action. This is called active voice. In passive voice, the action is done without anyone or thing doing it. Notice how much more concise and informative the active sentence is. You know not only the fate of your proposal, but also who decided that fate.

Passive voice: It has been decided that your proposal is rejected. (9 words)

Active voice: Mr. Brown rejected your proposal. (5 words)

Use Definite, Specific, Concrete Language

- Use nouns and verbs.
- Prefer the specific to the general.

Hail battered the city during the lunch hour.

not

A period of unfavorable weather set in this afternoon.

- Put statements in a positive form.

He usually came late.

not

He was not very often on time.

Repair Sentence Fragments

- To be a sentence, a word group must have at least one independent clause. An independent clause has a subject and a verb, and it either stands alone or could stand alone.

Incorrect: She dropped the cup. Which had cost twenty dollars.

Correct: She dropped the cup, which had cost twenty dollars.

Avoid Run-On Sentences

- Use a period where necessary. Don't make a sentence try to do too much.

Run-On: The comma splice is a common error it is the exact opposite of a fragment.

Correct: The comma splice is a common error. It is the exact opposite of a fragment.

- Beware the Comma Splice: the joining of two sentences with a comma where a period or semicolon is required.

Comma Splice: The comma splice is a common error, it is the exact opposite of a fragment.

Correct: The comma splice is a common error. It is the exact opposite of a fragment.

Agree, Agree, Agree

- Don't switch verb tense without reason. When in doubt it is best to maintain the same verb tense.
- Make the verb agree with its subject. The number of the subject determines the number of the verb.
- Make sure the pronoun agrees with the noun it is replacing.

Remember the Four Basic Commas

- The Introducer – Use a comma after an introductory phrase or clause.

After the first letter, she wrote again.

- The Coordinator – Use a comma between sentences joined by and, but, or, nor, yet, so. Please note: if two or more independent clauses are not joined by a conjunction and form a single sentence, the proper mark of punctuation is a semicolon. Therefore, both of the following sentences are correct.

He was tired, and he went home.

He was tired; he went home.

- The Inserter – Put a pair of commas around every inserted word phrase or clause that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence. When you cut a sentence in two to insert something, make sure you put a comma at both ends.

Incorrect: The car, an ancient Volkswagen is still running.

Correct: The car, an ancient Volkswagen, is still running.

- The Linker – Use a comma to link items in series and to link additional phrases or thoughts to a sentence.

Series: He loved to hunt, to fish, and to hike.

Additional phrase; afterthought: They went home, having overstayed their welcome.