

Editing and Proofreading Tips and Checklists

Introduction

This is Planet Editing's guide to editing and proofreading of academic manuscripts, business reports, and other writing.

The document is divided into the following sections:

- 1) Types of Editing
 - 2) Editing Tips
 - 3) Editing Checklist
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Types of Editing

There are four types of editing and each requires different skills. They are:

- Proofreading
- Copyediting
- Hard editing
- Technical editing

A brief explanation of each is given below:

Proofreading involves carefully checking a document for punctuation and spelling. It also requires looking for consistent usage of terms, and language (e.g., British or American English).

Copyediting involves editing a document for grammar usage, but also for a consistent read and pacing. Take for example the Economist magazine in which every page reads the same. In some cases, such as large firms, government organizations, etc, the copyeditor is asked to produce documents to certain guidelines. Gender-neutral phrasing is an example.

Hard editing involves rewriting whole paragraphs and sometimes even a whole document. This is common practice when editing documents by non-native speakers of English, but is also normal practice when any writer has difficulty expressing their ideas clearly and succinctly.

Technical editing involves fact checking a document, finding flaws in logic or fallacious statements. All scientific, academic, and finance and business writing requires technical editing.

Editing tips

Honest, Tactful, and Firm

Being a good editor involves many different skills, but number one amongst these is the ability to communicate honestly, tactfully, and firmly.

Understanding the Goal

An editor understands the purpose of a manuscript. He knows what both the writer and publisher want to achieve.

Understanding the Reader

The editor's job is much more about understanding the reader than the writer. The editor must be familiar with the target audience, their expectations, and preferences. This is what the editor brings to the writer.

Voice

A good editor can keep the voice of the original author if required or bring a document a whole new feel. However, the editor's job is not to impose his or her own voice.

Objectivity

The best editors are dispassionate and objective. They need to be to ensure the author's message is being communicated honestly.

Deadlines

Good editors meet deadlines. They do not over commit themselves and they work to achieve what they've promised. Elements of editing are meticulous so a good editor is well organized. Authors and publishers should be kept in the loop at all times.

Publishing Process and Language Requirements

Good editors have an excellent grasp of English and its usage. They also understand publishing requirements. All publishers have their own expectations, style, etc. The editor must be aware of these. In the case of journal publications, journals will post on their websites guidelines to authors.

Editors' Checklist

The following checklist should be useful for old-hands as well as novice editors:

Review each paper according to the following areas:

- Content
- Text structure
- Paragraphs
- Grammar
- Sentence structure
- Vocabulary
- Expression
- Spelling and punctuation
- Presentation
- Tables, graphs and illustrations
- Referencing and citations

Content

- Does the author clearly state the purpose of their project?

- Does the author cover all aspects as stated in the introduction?
 - Does the author offer a critical review of literature or previous research?
 - Is their central argument clear?
 - Are supporting arguments clear?
 - Is the article within word limit requirements?
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Text Structure Does the structure of the paper match its purpose e.g., essay, journal article, business report?

Note: Journals will provide guidelines for structure. Most require the following:

Title page, title authors, contact author, abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, procedure, results, discussion, conclusion, recommendations, acknowledgements, references and appendices.

- Does the article meet word count limits in both the abstract and manuscript?
 - Does the author avoid unnecessary repetition of concepts and ideas? This is prevalent in the rhetorical style of some cultures.
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Paragraphs

- Is there a logical connection and flow between paragraphs?
- Does each paragraph contain a single main idea?
- Is the main idea supported well by the remaining sentences?
- Is the paragraph of appropriate length?
- Are ideas connected well within the paragraph?

Grammar Check for:

- Subject-verb agreement
 - Use of nouns, countable and non-countable.
 - Verb tense
 - Articles, especially over use or inappropriate use.
 - Prepositions
 - Word forms, such as adjectival usage and the use of hyphens
 - Pronouns – common errors There for Their, Your for You're, etc.
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Sentence Structure Edit sentence structure for:

- Complete sentences
 - Sentence variety
 - Overly wordy, especially the use of passive structures.
 - Use of modifiers, misplaced or dangling.
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Vocabulary

Check for:

- Formal versus informal usage
 - Creation of nouns, especially relevant in technical and scientific writing
 - Use of abbreviations and acronyms, especially article usage e.g., don't use 'the' before acronyms you pronounce as words such as UNESCO, but do use 'the' before the WHO.
 - Introduction and explanation of terms used.
 - Over use jargon or jingoism.
 - Clear and accurate usage.
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Expression

Check for:

- Redundancies: I killed him dead.
 - Tautologies: He'll either win or he won't.
 - Slang
 - Conciseness
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Presentation

Presentation is often dictated by the type of publication e.g., journal, report, or user guide. Many journals have presentation guides available online. The following are some general tips:

- Line spacing
 - Use of italics, e.g., for Latin derived words some publications use this.
 - Font size
 - Sections numbering
 - Page and line numbering
 - Hierarchy of capitalization, use of bolding
 - Section titles
 - Headers, footers and end notes.
 - Margins, indenting of paragraphs
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Spelling and Punctuation

Do the following:

- Run spell checker

- Reread for appropriate use of words
 - Check journal or publishing guidelines for punctuation usage. E.g., journals have different conventions for punctuation especially with regard to references: (Liu et al., 2009) (Liu *et al.* 2009)
 - Take your time, print out the document if it helps.
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Tables and Figures

Remember most publishers will control layout for themselves. Unless otherwise instructed figures and tables come as separate attachments and are not embedded in the document. Ask if this is required?

Check as follows:

- Titles and captions
 - Properly cited in the article i.e., figure numbers match descriptions.
 - Separate figure and table captions only file.
 - List of figures and tables included
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References

Different publishers have different standards for reference presentation. There is also reference creation software available.

In general:

- Does the author acknowledge all sources?
- Is the format appropriate?
- Are direct quotes used and is paraphrasing accurate?
- Are references consistent?

References:

Beaumont, T. (2007), *Editing And Proofreading*, Teaching and Learning Unit, Faculty of Economics, Melbourne University.