

Editing and proofreading

Editing and proofreading are essential to ensuring consistency in content and that your writing is clear, concise and free of errors.

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Why edit? To ensure your writing is clear, consistent and concise, and that you are conveying the intended message to your audience.

1. Look at the structure of the piece. Does it flow logically? Are there any jumps in there, assuming the reader knows what you're talking about? Each sentence should add something to the reader's understanding, building up in layers. If a sentence doesn't add anything, be ruthless – and cut it out.
2. Look at the content of the piece. Does it contain repetition? Does it contain information for general interest? Organise the material carefully so that things are covered in one place in the piece of writing. Boil down what you need to say to plain English, for example: "There has been a rise in employment on a part-time basis" should be "There has been a rise in part-time employment".
3. Look at the clarity of the piece. Are you saying things that are obvious or extraneous? "The relevant information can be found..." – as opposed to the irrelevant information? Try "Information on this can be found...". Is any of the phrasing obscure? Pick the subject of your sentence, what you really want to get across to your audience, and communicate it. If you've done this with every sentence then you should be clearly communicating what you want to. "The national institute in charge of the statistical files of medical personnel in France provided a list of physicians in the Rhone-Alpes region, from which 600 doctors were randomly selected." The fact that the 600 doctors from the Rhone-Alpes region were chosen as case studies should be the focus of this sentence, not the national institute. The sentence should be rewritten something like this: "The case studies were chosen from a list of 600 doctors working in the Rhone-Alpes region. The list was supplied by the national institute in charge of medical personnel in France."

If you need a quote to spur you on: "Perfection is achieved not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away".

Things to remember when editing:

- leave a night between writing and editing
- read it through first without trying to pick anything up – give yourself a break
- check the legibility and structure
- the more you look through, the more you find

- use short sentences
- don't use the passive voice
- does every sentence add something? And is it clear what it adds? If not, rip it out
- cut before you add anything
- get someone who isn't an expert to read it to say if they understand it
- read it slowly so you see what is there – not what you expect to see
- do it somewhere you can concentrate – quiet rooms are ideal for this work
- ask your in-house editorial team to have a look through it
- use consistent terminology, spellings, tone and formatting
- use a print version if it's easier – you blink less when reading on screen so your eyes dry out

Why proofread? To make sure your work is error-free. This is different to editing. Edit then proofread, never the other way around. The proofread is the final check before you publish something. Some of the advice remains the same for proofing as for editing.

Things to remember when proofreading:

- leave a night between writing and proofing – never proofread in the afternoon
- read it through first without trying to pick anything up – give yourself a break
- comb through for spelling and grammar
- the more you look through, the more you find
- get someone else to look through it, not the person who wrote it
- read it out loud
- read it slowly so you see what is there – not what you expect to see
- split any data and charts – check one, then the other, then any references in the text to the data
- check the format – extra line spaces, check how images sit in text, how the paragraphs sit
- do it somewhere you can concentrate – quiet rooms are ideal for this work
- ask your in-house editorial team to have a look through it
- use a print version if it's easier – you blink less when reading on screen so your eyes dry out