

Your dissertation: editing and proofreading

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Objectives

- Suggest strategies and techniques to enable you to:
- put distance between yourself and your work so you can look at it critically
- bring together the sections of your work
- express your ideas clearly

Bringing things together

Ask yourself the big questions:

What's it about? (Theme)

Who is it for? (Audience)

Why am I doing it? (Purpose)

Make connections:

Comment on the text you're writing

Expressing yourself clearly

- Keep it simple

Don't use a long word when a short one will do.

- Keep it concise

Use as few words as you can to express your meaning.

- Keep it direct

Paragraphing

Outlining paragraphs

- Write a list of the points you want to cover.
- Look at your list: are any of these actually more than one point?
- Can you drop any points?
- Are they in the right order?
- Write a paragraph on each one.

Paragraph structure

- Decide on the main point (open paragraph with topic sentence)
- Define terms, elaborate.
- Illustrate your point.
- Discuss illustrations, examples or evidence: show how they say what you say they say.

Sentences

Your reader needs to be clear what entity/ concept etc you are referring to:

Not

~~*Many people today drink too much alcohol, smoke and eat unhealthy foods. This has led to a strain on resources for the National Health Service.*~~

But

Many people today drink too much alcohol, smoke and eat unhealthy foods. These behaviours have led to a strain on resources for the National Health Service.

Sentences

Try not to end sentences with generalizations:

Not

~~*How people communicate with each other is changing through the growth of Twitter, Facebook and so on.*~~

But

How people communicate with each other is changing through the growth of social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

Editing

Where have we got to and where are we going next?

Being critical

Being critically analytical means asking questions:

- What?
- Why?
- Why in this way?
- What other ways?
- With what effect?
- How do you know?
- Who says so?
- What do other people say?
- How + adjective
(eg How important / useful/ effective etc)
- So what?

How to critique your own work

Playing cards exercise:

- Each person has a set of 20 playing cards
- Select 1 or 2 cards from the list. Look at your writing and follow the instructions on the card you have chosen

Managing the editing process

- Remind yourself of the **reader**
- Leave **time** between writing and editing
- If you can't leave much time, do something **different**
- Remind yourself of **the purpose of the piece**
- '**Hear**' what you have written, sound the words out in your head or read out loud
- Get **feedback** on your work

Proofreading

4 key questions to ask yourself:

- Is it relevant?
- Is it clear?
- Is it objective?
- Does it make sense?

What to proofread for

- Content (ie *what* you are saying)
 - Is it relevant?
 - Does it make sense?
- Language (how you are saying it)
 - Is it clear?
 - Is it objective?
 - Does it make sense?

Tips for effective proofreading

- read your work aloud
 - *if it sounds strange to you, it will probably sound strange to someone else: stop and work out what the problem is*
 - *if it sounds monotonous or too fragmented, try altering the sentence lengths (this will alter the rhythm)*
 - record yourself and play it back while you read silently
- cover the page below the line you're reading
- use your fingers (like when children learn to read)
- try reading it backwards as well as forwards

Tips for effective proofreading

- Use **colour coding**
 - for content
 - for connections between content
 - for connections between content and main research question + hypothesis
 - for language (eg Subject-Verb-Object)
- Give yourself time
- Do more than once
 - as you go along
 - when everything's finished
- Take a break when you're getting tired/bored

Language

- Subject/verb agreement esp when many words between them
- Missing –s
- Tenses (be consistent)
- Pronouns /determiners (*he, she, it, they, this, that...*)
 - check they are (a) correct and (b) it is clear what they apply to
 - *this* + noun
- Prepositions (*to, for, from, between...*)
- Articles (*a, an, the*)
- *Less/fewer*
- Relative clauses
- Punctuation (read aloud)
- British English or American English?

Grammar & spellcheckers are NOT a substitute for proofreading.

Presentation

- Font + font size
- Line spacing
- Extra space between paragraphs
- Start new chapters on a new page
- Check Contents page, section numbering (etc) is consistent with what you've actually done
- Don't have subheadings near the foot of page
- Page numbering
- Referencing
- Reference list/Bibliography

Further reading

UEA Learning Enhancement Team:

www.uea.ac.uk/dos/dissertations

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Swan, M. (2005). *Practical English Usage* (3rd edition). Oxford. OUP.

Truss, L. (2003) *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*. London. Puffin.