Guide to Self-Editing

One of our goals here at the Connors Writing Center is to turn you into your own writing assistant. We aim to teach you self-editing skills so that you can learn to revise and proofread your work yourself. Writing is a process; ideally, you will give yourself enough time to draft an essay and then return to it to revise the overall content and structure of the piece, as well as to proofread for stylistic and grammatical issues. Use the following guidelines and checklists as a guide to self-editing.

General Guidelines

- **Take a break.** Give yourself a bit of distance from the writing will help you see your work from a fresh perspective.

- **Read aloud.** You'll be surprised how different your writing sounds out loud than it does in your head. Hearing it aloud will make awkward phrasings and redundancies more apparent to you, and it will help you catch missing or repeated words.

- **Ask a friend for help.** A new reader can offer insight on your content and can catch mistakes you've overlooked.

- **Personalize your proofreading.** Review your instructor's comments and any notes from your appointments at the Connors Writing Center and pay attention to which errors you commit frequently. Learn to recognize and fix them, and then proofread with a specific eye toward these errors.

- **Revise the big stuff first.** It might be tempting to skim through quickly, just looking for typos, but if you're serious about doing well, you should revise first, considering the ways you might restructure your essay or make your argument more logical and effective. When you're confident in the essay's content, move on to editing the smaller stuff, like spelling and grammar. Move down the checklist on the following pages more or less in order, from higher to lower order concerns. If you correct spelling and grammar first and then find you have to rewrite entire paragraphs anyway, you'll have to go back and edit it all over again.

A Note for ESL Writers

It may not be helpful for you to read aloud or hear your own writing. Experiment with different proofreading techniques to see what works best for you. You can practice correcting commonly made errors here at the Connors Writing Center, but it would also be helpful for you to find a writing partner who is a native speaker. They can help you proofread for mistakes with article usage, for example, which do not always follow predictable rules.

Self-Editing Checklist

If you are unfamiliar with any of the terms used below, ask a writing assistant to explain, or see our collection of handouts, which can be found in the center and under the "Resources" tab on our website.

Overall Content

❑ Have you reread the assignment to make sure you've covered all parts adequately?

❑ Is your **thesis** clear, specific, and arguable? Does it provide a straightforward outline for the rest of the paper?

❑ Is the tone and language of your writing appropriate for the intended audience?

❑ Do body paragraphs have **topic sentences** that summarize the main point and content of the paragraph and correspond to the thesis statement?

❑ Do you use concrete details and examples to support your claim AND explain how that evidence supports your claim?

❑ Do you use effective transitions to move between paragraphs and ideas? Readers shouldn't have to make their own jumps in logic; use transitions and topic sentences to guide them through the paper.

Sentence Structure

❑ Have you varied sentence structure and length?

❑ Have you reviewed each sentence to eliminate run-ons, fragments, and comma splices?

❑ Are parallel ideas expressed in parallel form?

❑ Have you eliminated dangling, unclear, or awkward modifiers?

❑ Have you tried to eliminate wordiness by removing unnecessary words such as *a lot*, or *really?*

Grammar and Usage

❑ Do all verbs agree with their subjects? Double check long, complex sentences.

❑ Do pronouns have clear and correct referents?

❑ Have you eliminated any unintentional or incorrect shifts in tense?

❑ Is your paper properly punctuated? Review usage rules, especially for semicolons, if you're at all unclear.

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❑ Are all quotes and paraphrases properly introduced and explained? Are they correctly cited both within the text and in a bibliography/works cited/reference list/etc.?

❑ Is all spelling correct? Be specifically careful of homonyms like *your/you're, to/too/two,* and *there/their/they're.*

Style

❑ Have you replaced "to be" verbs (*be, been, is, are, were, was*) with stronger, active verbs?

❑ Do you use passive voice only where appropriate (such as in scientific papers), relying instead on active voice to increase directness?

❑ Have you eliminated jargon, slang, clichés, and euphemisms in favor of more precise language?

❑ Have you eliminated repetition and redundancies? Read each sentence and ask yourself if it introduces new information, ideas, analysis, or clarity. If it is simply restating old information, rewrite or delete it.

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