



Editing Your Writing

All writers, even professional writers, have personal "trouble spots" or editing problems that are most likely to occur in their writing. The key to becoming your own best editor is to get to know which areas of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics are most likely to cause you trouble.

Many writers find that editing in several stages, looking for different problems at different times, improves their overall ability to polish their writing. Once you have completed a final draft, print out a hard copy of your paper and "let it rest" for a few hours or overnight before you begin to edit.

Then try to break your editing process down into the following three steps:

1. Read aloud.

First, read the paper *aloud* from beginning to end. As you read, listen to the overall effect of the paper. Read with a pen or pencil in hand so that if you discover missing words or unclear sentences, or if some sentences just do not seem to "flow," you can place a check mark in the margin. Remember to read slowly, which forces you to see the words on the page—not just the ones you thought you put there.

2. Read the trouble sections.

Next, read for trouble. Return to the beginning of your essay, and reread any areas that you marked while reading aloud. Try to analyze why the sentence does not seem clear. Underline the subject and the verb, group phrases and clauses. This will help you see what the sentence is made of, which can help you make it what it should be. If you know that you have a tendency to create certain types of errors when you write, check each trouble spot carefully for those errors. Mark corrections on your text as you read.

3. Read backwards.

Finally, try to read your paper *backwards*, sentence by sentence. Reading backwards slows your overall reading speed and forces you to focus on just one sentence at a time. Use this reading as one last check for trouble spots in your work, especially sentence errors like comma splices and sentence fragments. In fact, this check is best done after you have made the changes you already marked—in short, using a fresh, clean draft.

If you need help with grammar, punctuation, and mechanics, review your personal trouble spots in a resource like Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* or visit the Writing Center with that goal in mind.

Once you have finished editing your work, do not forget to run spell check one last time, print out a final copy, and then *proofread your final copy* one last time to catch any final typos created accidentally while during the editing process.