

The *Writing* Center

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Molloy College—Casey 016

Essential Writing Tips—an Editing Checklist

The following editing checklist provides tips for you to consider before and after you write your draft. While some common trouble spots are addressed here, you may need to tackle other issues in more depth with the help of your instructor or consultant. You may also wish to refer to a current grammar handbook for further advice and examples.

Cover the Basics

- Read the assignment with care: be sure to address *all* requirements. Brainstorm and outline possible methods of organization.
- Develop a compelling introduction and a clear controlling idea in the opening paragraph.
- Support all ideas and arguments with specific facts, evidence, and details that reflect and develop the thesis in the body paragraphs. Include relevant attributions and citations.
- Present a decisive, logical conclusion.
- Include a references or works cited page if applicable.

Consider Style

- Use appropriate tone, language, and level of formality for perceived audience, genre, and assignment.
- Eliminate or limit contractions (doesn't, here's, isn't, there's, won't). Note→ some contractions may be appropriate in personal, reflective writing, but not in formal assignments.
- Consider point of view: Use of personal pronouns such as *I*, *we*, and *you* are often inappropriate in academic writing, as are colloquial expressions (slang, clichés).
- Recognize and delete stereotypical references and sexist language: not all nurses are female; not all mail carriers are male. Use gender-neutral terms like businessperson, firefighter, chairperson.
- Vary sentences, and avoid repetition and wordiness.
- Use active voice, which often leads to clearer, more concise sentences. (Passive voice is appropriate in some styles where the convention is to place the emphasis on the action rather than on the actor.)

Example active voice: The committee chairperson (actor) made the decision to delay the meeting.

Example passive voice: The decision (action) was made by the committee chairperson to delay the meeting.

Common Errors

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Recognize sentence fragments (an incomplete sentence that lacks a subject, a verb, or a complete thought), and fix by supplying the missing element.

Example fragment: Because she did not understand the assignment.

Revision: Susan met with the professor because she did not understand the assignment.

Recognize run-on sentences (complete sentences that run together without punctuation), and fix by supplying appropriate punctuation: a period, a semicolon, or a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

Example run-on sentence: The business failed two years ago the company filed for bankruptcy.

Revision 1. The business failed two years ago. The company filed for bankruptcy.

Revision 2. The business failed two years ago; the company filed for bankruptcy.

Revision 3. The business failed two years ago, and the company filed for bankruptcy.

Recognize comma splices (a comma splice occurs when a comma separates two complete sentences), and fix by supplying appropriate punctuation: replace the comma with a period or a semicolon, or add a conjunction after the comma.

Example comma splice: The initial instructions were vague, many users misunderstood them.

Revision 1. The initial instructions were vague. Many users misunderstood them.

Revision 2. The initial instructions were vague; many users misunderstood them.

Revision 3. The initial instructions were vague, and many users misunderstood them.

Check for pronoun agreement (pronouns should agree in number, person, and gender with the nouns they replace, the antecedents).

Example pronoun agreement problem: When a student falls behind in a course, they often have a difficult time completing all the assignments.

Revision: When a student falls behind in a course, she or he often has a difficult time completing all the assignments.

Note: Indefinite pronouns (anybody, anyone, everybody, everyone, one, somebody, no one, and nobody) are singular.

Other pronoun errors occur when the antecedent is missing or unclear, or when the pronoun is placed too far from its antecedent. Review your writing for unclear references: he, she, it, this, they, them, these.

Check for subject/verb agreement. A problem occurs when a verb does not agree in number with its subject. To correct lack of agreement, identify the subject of the verb and change the verb to agree with the subject.

Example subject/verb error: One of the students are presenting the material to the class this Friday.

Revision: One of the students is presenting the material to the class this Friday.

Review for awkward/mixed construction. Awkward sentence structure occurs when parts of a sentence do not work grammatically or logically (or include misplaced or dangling modifiers). These sentences can be corrected by deleting, changing, or rearranging words.

Example awkward sentence: The rising cost of tuition is why students are accumulating so much debt.

Revision: Students are accumulating so much debt due to the rising cost of tuition.

Example: The CEO was described as a distinguished man with a heavy mustache weighing a hundred and seventy-five pounds. (This sentence is an example of a misplaced modifier.)

Revision: The CEO was described as a hundred and seventy-five pound distinguished man with a heavy mustache.

Example dangling modifier (there is no actor named here): To fulfill the requirements for the Business Degree, two writing courses must be completed.

Revision: To fulfill the requirements for the Business Degree, students must complete two writing courses.

Dangling modifiers are word groups that suggest but do not name an actor; the dangling modifier refers to something that is not named in the sentence. Misplaced modifiers modify something in the sentence that the writer did not intend to modify.

The following examples show how dangling or misplaced modifiers can alter intended meaning:

The officer found the lost dog dressed in uniform. (misplaced modifier)

Reading the New York Times, the cat settled on the chair. (dangling modifier)

The library includes books about circus elephants at the school. (misplaced modifier)

- Recognize and fix faulty parallelism. (Faulty parallelism occurs when parts of a sentence are presented with different grammatical structure.)

Example faulty parallelism: The assignment required students to research, evaluate, and analyzing their findings.

Revision: The assignment required students to research, evaluate, and analyze their findings.

Other Common Errors

- Review for apostrophe/possessive errors.

Example: The students book was on the table.

Revision: The student's book was on the table. (shows possession)

Example: Its too far to travel on foot.

Revision: It's too far to travel on foot. (It is)

- Review draft for commonly confused words and inaccurate word choice: affect/effect; accept/except; lose/loose; past/passed; sight/site/cite; their/there/they're; then/than; whether/weather; who's/whose; your/you're

Example: I would of completed the work.

Revision: I would have completed the work.

Example: He answered alot of the questions.

Revision: He answered a lot of the questions.

Revise—Revise—Revise

- Revise on a global-level (consider content, coherence, organization, style, and development).
- Revise on a sentence-level (proofread for errors in grammar and mechanics).
- Read your work out loud. Have others read your work.
- Allow ample time for the drafting process. Allow ample time....

"You write to discover what you want to say. You rewrite to discover what you have said and then rewrite to make it clear to other people."

-Donald Murray

