
Editing your own work

Mark Ragg

Aim

To make the document invisible so there is nothing between the reader and the meaning.

Today

- Mechanics of editing
 - basics of format, publication and editing
 - common errors
 - The thought behind editing
 - How to get outside yourself
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Basics of format

- White space
 - Type size – 10 point absolute minimum, 12 point preferable. Six point not acceptable, even in illustrations.
 - Portrait, not landscape
 - Single column
 - Flush left (not justified)
 - Use one font, and perhaps a second for headings
 - Minimise bold, italics and capitals
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Basics of publication

- Who – target audience?
 - What – what's it about?
 - When – why now?
 - Where – where is it being published?
 - Why – why are you writing it at all?
 - How – how will it be disseminated?
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Basics of editing process

- 1 – Thorough read: for structure and meaning, not typos.
 - 2 - Thorough read: Correct spelling, punctuation, grammar etc.
 - 3 - Thorough read: Check corrections
 - 4 - Paper read: Things look different.
 - 5 – Read aloud: Check sense and punctuation.
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Common errors I

- Poor structure – buried lead
 - Lack of purpose – who am I writing to and why?
 - Spellcheck errors – through not though or thorough
 - Literals – threw not through
 - Missing words – easy to miss on screen, easy to pick up when read aloud
 - Missing verb – if it sounds like a headline, re-write
 - Missing context – who, what, when, where, why and how?
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Common errors II

- Verbosity – too many words interfere with sense
 - Passive voice – use active voice instead
 - Too many adjectives and adverbs – hack them back
 - Too many fonts – minimise them
 - Latinate words – conclude not end, beginning not start
 - The *what?* factor – if you have to read it again, change it.
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Tricks

- Bench it
 - Read it somewhere else
 - Get someone else to read it
 - Clear your mind – read poetry
 - Read it aloud
 - Phone a friend
 - Tell your grandmother
 - Start from scratch.
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Tools

- A good dictionary – Oxford English Dictionary, Macquarie or Webster's (depends on preference and audience).
 - The Elements of Style by Strunk & White (or your favourite).
 - A printer.
 - A friend.
 - The courage to read your work aloud.
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Final points

- Aim for consistency
 - Read a few books of rules. Then accept there are no rules.
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Further reading

- <http://www.editorscanberra.org/checklist.pdf>
 - Style Guide: Australian Government Publishing Service.
 - The Penguin Writer's Manual by Manser and Curtis
 - The Complete Plain Words by Ernest Gowers
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Contact

Mark Ragg

School of Public Health

University of Sydney

mark@raggahmed.com
