Editing your own work

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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
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
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?
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.
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?
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.
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.
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.
Final points

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

- The Penguin Writer’s Manual by Manser and Curtis
- The Complete Plain Words by Ernest Gowers
Contact

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