5

Editing and Proofreading

When you finish revising your essay, it is tempting to just submit it to your instructor and breathe a sigh of relief, but you should resist this temptation. You still have to *edit* and *proofread* your paper to fix any problems that may remain after you revise.

When you **edit**, you search for grammatical errors, check punctuation, and look over your sentence style and word choice one last time. When you **proofread**, you look for spelling errors, typos, incorrect spacing, or problems with your essay's format. The idea is to look carefully for any error, no matter how small, that might weaken your essay's message or undermine your credibility. Remember, this is your last chance to make sure your essay says exactly what you want it to say.

Editing for Grammar

As you edit, keep in mind that certain grammatical errors occur more frequently than others and even more frequently in particular kinds of writing. By focusing on these errors, as well as on those errors you yourself are most likely to make, you will learn to edit your essays quickly and efficiently.

Learning the few rules that follow will help you to identify the most common errors. Later on, when you practice writing essays shaped by various patterns of development, the **Grammar in Context** section in each chapter can help you to recognize and correct these common errors.

Be Sure Subjects and Verbs Agree

Subjects and verbs must agree in number. A singular subject takes a singular verb.

Stephanie Ericsson discusses ten kinds of liars.

A plural subject takes a plural verb.

Chronic liars are different from occasional liars.

Liars and plagiarists have a lot in common.

For information on editing for subject–verb agreement with indefinite pronoun subjects, see the **Grammar in Context** section of Chapter 15 (pages 669–70).

Be Sure Verb Tenses Are Accurate and Consistent

Unintentional shifts in verb tense can be confusing to readers. Verb tenses in the same passage should be the same unless you are referring to two different time periods.

Single time period:

past tense
Lee surrendered to Grant on April 9, 1865, and
past tense
then he addressed his men.

Two different time periods:

In "Songs of the Summer of 1963 . . . and Today,"
present tense
Juan Williams compares contemporary music with
past tense
music that was popular fifty years earlier.

For more information on editing for consistent verb tenses, as well as to eliminate unwarranted shifts in voice, person, and mood, see the **Grammar in Context** section of Chapter 9 (pages 264–265).

Be Sure Pronoun References Are Clear

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun in a sentence. Every pronoun should clearly refer to a specific **antecedent**, the word (a noun or pronoun) it replaces. Pronouns and antecedents must agree in number.

- Singular pronouns refer to singular antecedents.

  When she was attacked, Kitty Genovese was on her way home from work.

- Plural pronouns refer to plural antecedents.

  The people who watched the attack gave different reasons for their reluctance to call for help.

For information on editing for pronoun–antecedent agreement with indefinite pronouns, see the **Grammar in Context** section of Chapter 15 (pages 669–70).

Be Sure Sentences Are Complete

A **sentence** is a group of words that includes a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought. A **fragment** is an incomplete sentence, one that is missing a subject, a verb, or both a subject and a verb or that has a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought.

Sentence:	Although it was written in 1963, Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" remains just as powerful today as it was then.
Fragment (no subject):	Remains just as powerful today.
Fragment (no verb):	Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail."
Fragment (no subject or verb):	Written in 1963.
Fragment (includes subject and verb but does not express a complete thought):	Although it was written in 1963.

To correct a fragment, you need to supply the missing part of the sentence (a subject, a verb, or both — or an entire independent clause). Often, you will find that the missing words appear in an adjacent sentence.

Be Careful Not to Run Sentences Together without Proper Punctuation

There are two kinds of **run-ons**: *comma splices* and *fused sentences*.

A **comma splice** is an error that occurs when two independent clauses are connected by just a comma.

Comma splice: As Linda Hasselstrom points out, women who live alone need to learn how to protect themselves, ; sometimes that means carrying a gun.

A **fused sentence** is an error that occurs when two independent clauses are connected without any punctuation.

Fused sentence: Residents of isolated rural areas may carry guns for protection , but ^ sometimes these guns may be used against them.

For more information on editing run-ons, including additional ways to correct them, see the **Grammar in Context** section of Chapter 6 (page 100).

Be Careful to Avoid Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

Modifiers are words and phrases that describe other words in a sentence. To avoid confusion, place modifiers as close as possible to the words they modify.

Limited by her circumstances, the protagonist of Jamaica Kincaid's "'Girl'" has a difficult life.

Working hard at seemingly endless repetitive tasks, she feels trapped.

A **misplaced modifier** appears to modify the wrong word because it is placed incorrectly in the sentence.

Misplaced modifier: Judith Ortiz Cofer wonders why Latin women are so often stereotyped as either "hot tamales" or low-level workers in her essay "The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Just Met a Girl Named Maria." *(Does Cofer's essay stereotype Latin women?)*

Correct: In her essay "The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Just Met a Girl Named Maria," Judith Ortiz Cofer wonders why Latin women are so often stereotyped as either "hot tamales" or low-level workers.

A **dangling modifier** "dangles" because it cannot logically describe any word in the sentence.

Dangling modifier: Visiting ground zero, the absence of the World Trade Center was strikingly obvious. (*Who was visiting ground zero?)*

Correct: Visiting ground zero, Suzanne Berne found the absence of the World Trade Center strikingly obvious.

For more information on editing to correct misplaced and dangling modifiers, see the **Grammar in Context** section of Chapter 7 (pages 158–59).

Be Sure Sentence Elements Are Parallel

Parallelism is the use of matching grammatical elements (words, phrases, or clauses) to express similar ideas. Used effectively — for example, with paired items or items in a series — parallelism makes the links between related ideas clear and emphasizes connections.

Paired items: As Deborah Tannen points out, men speak more than women in public but less than women at home.

Items in a series: Amy Tan says, "I spend a great deal of my time thinking about the power of language — the way it can evoke an emotion, a visual image, a complex idea, or a simple truth" (458).

Faulty parallelism — using items that are not parallel in a context in which parallelism is expected — makes ideas difficult to follow and will likely confuse your readers.

Faulty parallelism:	As Deborah Tannen points out, men speak more than women in public, but at home less talking is done by them.
Correct:	As Deborah Tannen points out, men tend to speak more than women in public, but they tend to talk less at home.
Faulty parallelism:	Amy Tan says she often thinks about "the power of language" — for example, how it suggests images or emotions or complicated ideas can also be suggested or language can communicate a "simple truth" (458).
Correct:	Amy Tan says, "I spend a great deal of my time thinking about the power of language — the way it can evoke an emotion, a visual image, a complex idea, or a simple truth" (458).

For more information on using parallelism to strengthen your writing, see the Grammar in Context section of Chapter 11 (page 377).

CHECKLIST EDITING FOR GRAMMAR

- ☐ **Subject–verb agreement** Do all your verbs agree with their subjects? Remember that singular subjects take singular verbs and that plural subjects take plural verbs.
- ☐ **Verb tenses** Are all your verb tenses accurate and consistent? Have you avoided unnecessary shifts in tense?
- ☐ **Pronoun reference** Do pronouns clearly refer to their antecedents?
- ☐ **Fragments** Does each group of words punctuated as a sentence have both a subject and a verb and express a complete thought? If not, can you correct the fragment by adding the missing words or by attaching it to an adjacent sentence?
- ☐ **Run-ons** Have you been careful not to connect two independent clauses without the necessary punctuation? Have you avoided comma splices and fused sentences?
- ☐ **Modification** Does every modifier point clearly to the word it modifies? Have you avoided misplaced and dangling modifiers?
- ☐ **Parallelism** Have you used matching words, phrases, or clauses to express equivalent ideas? Have you avoided faulty parallelism?

Editing for Punctuation

Like grammatical errors, certain punctuation errors are more common than others, particularly in certain contexts. By understanding a few punctuation rules, you can learn to identify and correct these errors in your writing.

Learn When to Use Commas — and When Not to Use Them

Commas separate certain elements of a sentence. They are used most often in the following situations:

- To separate an introductory phrase or clause from the rest of the sentence

  In Janice Mirikitani's poem "Suicide Note," the speaker is a college student.

  According to the speaker, her parents have extremely high expectations for her.

  Although she has tried her best, she has disappointed them.

NOTE: Do not use a comma if a dependent clause *follows* an independent clause: She has disappointed them although she has tried her best.

- To separate two independent clauses that are joined by a coordinating conjunction

  The speaker in "Suicide Note" tried to please her parents, but they always expected more of her.

- To separate elements in a series

  Janice Mirikitani has studied creative writing, edited a literary magazine, and published several books of poetry.

For more information on using commas in a series, see the **Grammar in Context** section of Chapter 8 (pages 209–10).

- To separate a **nonrestrictive clause** (a clause that does not supply information that is essential to the sentence's meaning) from the rest of the sentence

  The poem's speaker, who is female, thinks her parents would like her to be a son.

NOTE: Do not use commas to set off a **restrictive clause** (a clause that supplies information that is vital to the sentence's meaning): The child who is overlooked is often the daughter.

Learn When to Use Semicolons

Semicolons, like commas, separate certain elements of a sentence. However, semicolons separate only grammatically equivalent elements — for example, two closely related independent clauses.

In Burma, George Orwell learned something about the nature of imperialism; it was not an easy lesson.

Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" is fiction; however, many early readers thought it was a true story.

In most cases, commas separate items in a series. However, when one or more of the items in a series already include commas, separate the items with semicolons. This will make the series easier to follow.

Orwell set his works in Paris, France; London, England; and Moulmein, Burma.

Learn When to Use Apostrophes

Apostrophes have two uses: to indicate missing letters in contractions and to show possession or ownership.

- In contractions:

  Amy Chua notes, "I've thought long and hard about how Chinese parents can get away with what they do" (404).

- To show possession:

  Chua's essay lists a number of things her daughters were never allowed to do, including having a playdate, watching TV, and choosing their own extracurricular activities.

NOTE: Be careful not to confuse contractions with similar-sounding possessive pronouns.

CONTRACTION	POSSESSIVE
they're (= they are)	their
it's (= it is, it has)	its
who's (= who is, who has)	whose
you're (= you are)	your

Learn When to Use Quotation Marks

Quotation marks are used to set off quoted speech or writing.

At the end of his essay, E. B. White feels "the chill of death" (194).

Special rules govern the use of other punctuation marks with quotation marks:

- Commas and periods are always placed before quotation marks.
- Colons and semicolons are always placed after quotation marks.
- Question marks and exclamation points can go either before or after quotation marks, depending on whether or not they are part of the quoted material.

Quotation marks are also used to set off the titles of essays ("Once More to the Lake"), stories ("The Lottery"), and poems ("Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day?").

NOTE: Italics are used to set off titles of books, periodicals, and plays: *Life on the Mississippi, College English, Hamlet.*

For information on formatting quotations in research papers, see Chapter 17.

Learn When to Use Dashes and Colons

Dashes are occasionally used to set off and emphasize information within a sentence.

> Jessica Mitford wrote a scathing critique of the funeral industry — and touched off an uproar. Her book *The American Way of Death* was widely read around the world.

Because this usage is somewhat informal, dashes should be used in moderation in your college writing.

Colons are used to introduce lists, examples, and clarifications. A colon should always be preceded by a complete sentence.

> Bich Minh Nguyen feels a sense of nostalgia for the snack cakes of her childhood: "Ho Hos, Ding Dongs, Sno Balls, Zingers, Donettes, Suzy Q's" (170).

For more information on using colons, see the **Grammar in Context** section of Chapter 12 (pages 439–40).

CHECKLIST EDITING FOR PUNCTUATION

- ☐ **Commas** Have you used commas when necessary — and only when necessary?
- ☐ **Semicolons** Have you used semicolons between only grammatically equivalent elements?
- ☐ **Apostrophes** Have you used apostrophes in contractions and possessive nouns and (when necessary) in possessive pronoun forms?
- ☐ **Quotation marks** Have you used quotation marks to set off quoted speech or writing and to set off titles of essays, stories, and poems? Have you used other punctuation correctly with quotation marks?
- ☐ **Dashes and colons** Have you used dashes in moderation? Is every colon that introduces a list, an example, or a clarification preceded by a complete sentence?

Exercise 1

Reread the essay you wrote in Chapters 2 through 4, and edit it for grammar and punctuation.

Exercise 2

Run a grammar check, and then make any additional corrections you think are necessary.

Editing for Sentence Style and Word Choice

REMINDER **EDITING**

Just as you do when you revise, you should edit on a hard copy of your essay. Seeing your work on the printed page makes it easy for you to spot surface-level errors in grammar and punctuation. You can also run a grammar check to help you find grammar and punctuation errors, but you should keep in mind that grammar checkers are far from perfect. They often miss errors (such as faulty modification), and they frequently highlight areas of text (such as a long sentence) that may not contain an error.

CLOSE VIEW

As you edit your essay for grammar and punctuation, you should also be looking one last time at how you construct sentences and choose words. So that your essay is as clear, readable, and convincing as possible, your sentences should be not only correct but also concise and varied. In addition, every word should mean exactly what you want it to mean, and your language should be free of clichés.

Eliminate Awkward Phrasing

As you review your essay's sentences, check carefully for awkward phrasing, and do your best to smooth it out.

Awkward: The reason Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence was because he felt the king was a tyrant.

Correct: The reason Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence was that he felt the king was a tyrant.

For more information about this error, see the **Grammar in Context** section of Chapter 10 (page 327).

Awkward: *Patriotism* is when you feel love and support for your country.

Correct: *Patriotism* is a feeling of love and support for one's country.

For more information about this error, see the **Grammar in Context** section of Chapter 13 (pages 487–88).

Be Sure Your Sentences Are Concise

A **concise** sentence is efficient; it is not overloaded with extra words and complicated constructions. To make sentences concise, you need to eliminate repetition and redundancy, delete empty words and expressions, and cut everything that is not absolutely necessary.

Wordy: Brent Staples's essay "Just Walk On By" explores his feelings, thoughts, and ideas about various events and experiences that were painful to him as a black man living in a large metropolitan city.

Concise: Brent Staples's essay "Just Walk On By" explores his ideas about his painful experiences as a black man living in a large city.

Be Sure Your Sentences Are Varied

To add interest to your paper, vary the length and structure of your sentences, and vary the way you open them.

- Mix long and short sentences.

  As time went on, and as he saw people's hostile reactions to him, Brent Staples grew more and more uneasy. Then, he had an idea.

- Mix simple, compound, and complex sentences.

  Simple sentence (*one independent clause*): Staples grew more and more uneasy.

  Compound sentence (*two independent clauses*): Staples grew more and more uneasy, but he stood his ground.

  Complex sentence (*dependent clause, independent clause*): Although Staples grew more and more uneasy, he continued to walk in the neighborhood.

For more information on how to form compound and complex sentences, see the **Grammar in Context** section of Chapter 14 (pages 535–36).

- Vary your sentence openings. Instead of beginning every sentence with the subject (particularly with a pronoun like *he* or *this*), begin some sentences with an introductory word, phrase, or clause that ties it to the preceding sentence.

  Even though many of the details of the incident have been challenged, the 1964 murder of Kitty Genovese, discussed in Martin Gansberg's "Thirty-Eight Who Saw Murder Didn't Call the Police," remains relevant today. For one thing, urban crime remains a problem, particularly for women. Moreover, many people are still reluctant to intervene when they witness a crime. Although more than fifty years have gone by, the story of Kitty Genovese and the people who watched her die still stirs strong emotional responses.

Choose Your Words Carefully

- **Use specific descriptive language**

  Vague: The rain beat upon the roof with a loud noise.

  Specific: "The rain beat upon the low, shingled roof with a force and clatter that threatened to break an entrance and deluge them there" (Chopin 197).

- **Choose words that develop specific supporting examples and explanations**

  Vague: Melany Hunt was eager to change her appearance, but this decision turned out to be a bad thing.

  Specific: Melany Hunt was eager to change her appearance, but she eventually regretted this decision, concluding that the change was a mistake and that "some impulses should definitely be resisted" (271).

- Avoid **clichés**, overused expressions that rely on tired figures of speech.

  Clichés: We were as free as the birds.

  Revised: "We were free like comets in the heavens, and we did whatever our hearts wanted" (Truong 672).

CHECKLIST **EDITING FOR SENTENCE STYLE AND WORD CHOICE**

- ☐ **Awkward phrasing** Have you eliminated awkward constructions?
- ☐ **Concise sentences** Have you eliminated repetition, empty phrases, and excess words? Is every sentence as concise as it can be?
- ☐ **Varied sentences** Have you varied the length and structure of your sentences? Have you varied your sentence openings?
- ☐ **Word choice** Have you selected specific words? Have you eliminated clichés?

Exercise 3

Check your essay's sentence style and word choice.

Proofreading Your Essay

When you proofread, you check your essay for surface errors, such as commonly confused words, misspellings, faulty capitalization, and incorrect italic use; then, you check for typographical errors.

Check for Commonly Confused Words

Even if you have carefully considered your choice of words during the editing stage, you may have missed some errors. As you proofread, look carefully to see if you can spot any **commonly confused words** — *its* for *it's, there* for *their,* or *affect* for *effect,* for example — that a spell check will not catch.

For more information on how to distinguish between *affect* and *effect,* see the Grammar in Context section of Chapter 10 (page 327).

Check for Misspellings and Faulty Capitalization

It makes no sense to work hard on an essay and then undermine your credibility with spelling and mechanical errors. If you have any doubt about how a word is spelled or whether or not to capitalize it, check a dictionary (in print or online).

Check for Typos

The last step in the proofreading process is to read carefully and look for typos. Make sure you have spaced correctly between words and have not accidentally typed an extra letter, omitted a letter, or transposed two letters. Reading your essay *backward* — one sentence at a time — will help you focus on individual sentences, which in turn can help you see errors more clearly.

CHECKLIST PROOFREADING

- ☐ **Commonly confused words** Have you proofread for errors involving words that are often confused with each other?
- ☐ **Misspelled words and faulty capitalization** Have you proofread for errors in spelling and capitalization? Have you run a spell check?
- ☐ **Typos** Have you checked carefully to eliminate typing errors?

Exercise 4

Proofread your essay.

LaunchPad

For more practice with editing and proofreading, see the LearningCurve activities in the LaunchPad for *Patterns*.

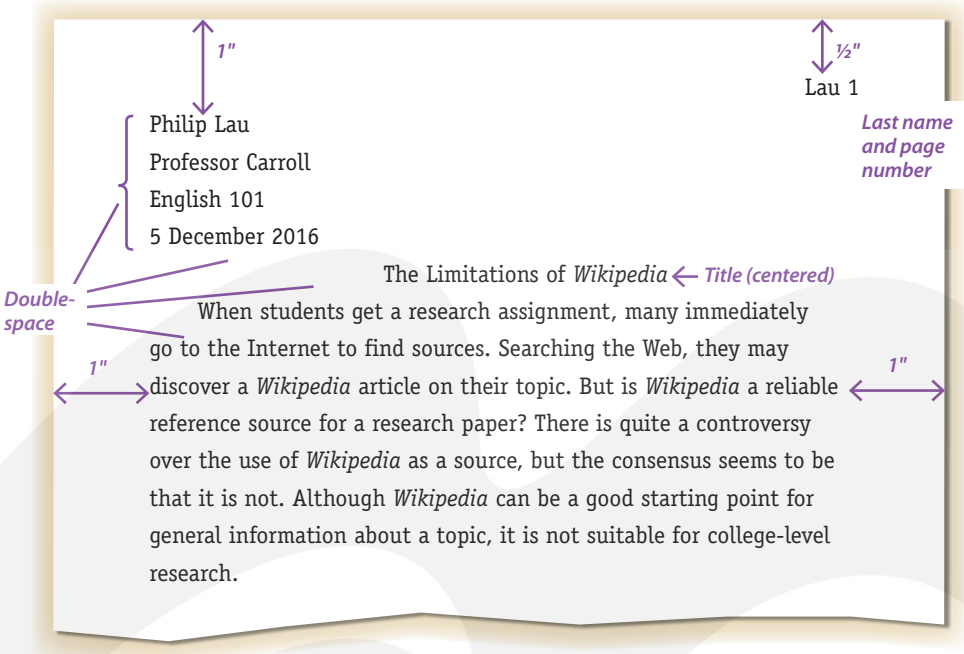
REMINDER SPELL CHECKERS

You should certainly use the spell check to help you locate misspelled words and incorrect strings of letters caused by typos, but keep in mind that it will not discover every error. For example, it will not identify many misspelled proper nouns or foreign words, nor will it highlight words that are spelled correctly but used incorrectly — *work* for *word* or *form* for *from*, for example. For this reason, you must still proofread carefully — even after reviewing material highlighted by the spell check.

CLOSE VIEW

Checking Your Paper's Format

The final thing to consider is your paper's **format**, or how your paragraphs, sentences, and words look on the page. Your instructor will give you some general guidelines about format — telling you, for example, to type your last name and the page number at the top right of each page — and, of course, you should follow these guidelines. Students writing in the humanities usually follow the format illustrated on page 91. (For information on MLA documentation format, see Chapter 18.)



CHECKLIST **CHECKING YOUR PAPER'S FORMAT**

- ☐ **Format** Have you followed your instructor's format guidelines?
- ☐ **Spacing** Have you double-spaced throughout?
- ☐ **Type size** Have you used ten- or twelve-point type?
- ☐ **Paragraphing** Have you indented the first line of every paragraph?
- ☐ **Visuals** If you used one or more visuals in your essay, did you insert each visual as close as possible to where it is discussed?
- ☐ **Documentation** Have you documented each source — and each visual — you used? Have you used the appropriate documentation format? Have you included a works-cited page?

Exercise 5

Make any necessary corrections to your essay's format, and then submit your final draft.