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Edit

Improve How You've Written

Learning Objectives

- Edit to improve diction
- Determine and maintain an appropriate style and tone
- Edit to ensure the tone is appropriate and consistent

Given all the time and effort you have put into your essay, you will want to make sure that your final draft represents your best work. This requires taking the time to edit and proofread your paper carefully.

If you have been working through each set of revisions, as Mariah and Jorge have, you have produced multiple drafts of your writing. So far, the changes have been focused on content. Perhaps with the help of peer feedback, you have made sure that you sufficiently supported your ideas. You have checked for problems with organization, unity, and coherence.

While the revision stage of the writing process focused on clarifying *what* you write (your ideas), the editing and proofreading stages focus on *how* you write—you express those ideas. Editing requires slow and careful rereading of the entire piece of writing, preferably aloud, to ensure that the writing effectively conveys ideas.

This section presents opportunities for you to focus on different aspects of the editing process. As with revision, you should approach editing in different stages. Also, at the end of the chapter is a comprehensive but more general list of things you should be looking for as well as guidelines for peer review focused on editing.

Taking a break from your essay for at least a day or two improves your ability to edit it effectively, so be sure to leave yourself enough time to complete this important step of the writing process.

The Purpose of Editing

Editing involves re-examining the way you have expressed your ideas and improving word choice (or diction), conciseness, grammar, and tone. You might add, delete, or change words. You'll fix problems in grammar and sentence structure. You might adjust the tone.

In this step, look for vague nouns and verbs that could be replaced with more specific, precise ones. Look for unnecessary words and phrases that add clutter to your writing, and delete them. If you are not certain about the meanings of vocabulary words, look them up in a dictionary to ensure you've used the word correctly, and if not, choose a better word.

By editing, you'll make your essay into a polished piece of writing, the end product of your best efforts.

Strategies for Editing

Editing strategies you can use include the following:

Read your paper aloud. Sometimes your ears catch inconsistencies that your eyes miss.

Share your paper with another reader whom you trust to give you honest feedback. It is often difficult to evaluate one's own style objectively—especially in the final phase of a challenging writing project. Another reader may be more likely to notice instances of wordiness, confusing language, or other issues that affect style and tone.

Edit your paper slowly, sentence by sentence. You may even wish to use a sheet of paper to cover up everything on the page except the paragraph you are editing. This practice forces you to read slowly and carefully. Mark any areas where you notice problems in style or tone, and then take time to rework those sections.

It is best to reread for style after you have completed the other revisions so that you are not distracted by any larger content issues.

Edit for Style and Tone

Once you are certain that the content of your paper fulfills your purpose (in other words, it is organized, coherent, and unified), you can begin editing to improve **style** and **tone**. Together, style and tone create the voice of your paper, or how you present yourself and your ideas to your reader.

Style refers to the way you use language as a writer—the sentence structures you use and the word choices you make. **Tone** is the attitude toward your subject and audience that you convey through your word choice.

Although accepted writing styles will vary within different disciplines, the underlying goal is the same—to present yourself as a knowledgeable, authoritative guide. Writing about research is like being a tour guide who walks readers through a topic. A stuffy, overly formal tour guide can make readers feel put off or intimidated. Too much informality or humour can make readers wonder whether the tour guide really knows what they are talking about. Extreme or emotionally charged language comes across as biased and subjective.

To avoid being overly formal or informal, determine an appropriate style and tone at the beginning of the writing process. In [Chapter 5: First Things First: Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Content](#), you considered your topic and audience because these aspects affect the required style and tone. For example, a paper on new breakthroughs in cancer research should be more formal than a paper on how to