

The Writing Center @ KUMC

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Self-Editing & Proofreading



Are They the Same Thing?

Editing is different from proofreading. While both depend on careful reading, each examines specific aspects of writing that lead to different outcomes for a piece of writing.

Editing begins once a first draft is written. It involves the process of rereading and making critical decisions about *content*. Usually, editing is an activity to improve focus/thesis, organization, impact, flow, clarity, and other large concerns or levels of significance.

There are a number of strategies and techniques that writers employ to self-edit. These include using a red ink pen, highlighter, or MS Word track changes function; reading out loud to hear how your writing sounds vs looks; following a step-by-step method such as “big picture” first, sentence-level second, and grammar last.

Keep in mind that editing is really about creating. Or rather, recreating. Drafting is creating. Or writing without editing. For most people, editing is criticizing. Yet editing has a creative dimension. It engages criticism in order to create again or better. Consider the analogy of pre-digital photography. In the dark room, the photo is placed in the developing tray. Slowly the picture emerges in the solution. This is closely akin to editing in which all one’s faculties (the developer solution) are focused on making writing understandable and presentable to an audience.

The writer undertakes this improvement work himself or herself, with or without the benefit of instructor or peer review. Hence “self-editing.”

Here are some large areas to include when you self-edit:

Structure

Does your paper have components such as introduction, background & significance, literature review, methods, results, and so on? Is your thesis/hypothesis/intervention clearly presented and developed from one section to another? Are the components working with or against one another? If you began with an outline, you can now scrutinize that plan to see if there’s a better arrangement.

Paragraphs

Do your paragraphs develop in a logical order? Does each paragraph have a topic sentence, stick to one main idea, and avoid redundancy and/or repetition? Are your paragraphs all one length or do they have variety?

Clarity

Does your paper define terms that would be unfamiliar to your audience? Does each sentence make its meaning clear? Is each sentence connected to the one that precedes and follows it?

Style

Do your sentences have variety in terms of length and structure? (See our handout on “Periodic and Loose Sentences.”) Does the passive voice dominate your paper? Are there many unnecessary or “filler” words and phrases such as “there is” and “there are” and “due to the fact”? Is a specific audience going to feel you are addressing them and their concerns or interests?

Grammar & Usage

Do all verbs agree with their subject? Are there tense shifts within the same sentence or same paragraph? Most writers are not grammarians, so utilizing resources such as handbooks and guides are indispensable.

