

EDITING

Editing is the equivalent of quality control for your reader. This last stage in the writing process might be compared to detailing an automobile—the preparation a dealer goes through to ready a new car for prospective buyers. Editing is done only after you are completely satisfied that you have made all of the big decisions about content, organization, and format—that you have said what you wanted to, where and how you intended, for your audience.

When you edit, you will check your work to make sure it is readable and correct. At this stage, pay close attention to

- sentences
- word choices
- punctuation
- spelling
- grammar and usage
- tone

As with revising, don't skip or rush through the editing process, thinking that once your ideas are down, your work is done. If your work is hard to read or contains mistakes in spelling or punctuation, readers will think that your ideas and your research are also faulty.

The following sections will give you basic guidelines about what to look for when you edit your sentences and words. "A Writer's Brief Guide to Paragraphs, Sentences, and Words," found in the Appendix on pages A-1–A-19, also contains helpful suggestions on using correct spelling and punctuation.

Editing Guidelines for Writing Lean and Clear Sentences

Here are four of the most frequent complaints readers voice about poorly edited writing in the world of work:

- **The sentences are too long.** I could not follow the writer's ideas easily.
- **The sentences are too complex,** making it hard to understand what the writer meant the first time I read the work; I had to reread it several times.

TECH NOTE

Editing

Word-processing programs available on tablets, smartphones, and computers make editing easy and efficient. These programs flag errors in spelling, punctuation, word choice, subject-verb agreement, wordiness, and sentence construction. But keep the following guidelines in mind when you use these programs. Be aware of what your computer can and cannot do for you.

- Customize your spell-checker. You can set your spell-checker to flag words that you frequently misspell and to ignore words that aren't in its dictionary (such as proper names, brand names, technical terms or concepts, etc.).
- Don't accept everything your spell-checker or grammar-checker tells you. While these tools are helpful, do not rely on them exclusively. For instance, a grammar-checker may fail to recognize homonyms (their/there or its/it's), and a spell-checker may highlight a proper name or industry jargon that is spelled correctly but is not included in your spell-checker's dictionary. When in doubt, use a dictionary or consult the Appendix of this book to verify the accuracy of your spelling and grammar. Popular online dictionaries include Dictionary.com (dictionary.reference.com) and Merriam-Webster (www.merriam-webster.com).
- Use global find and replace for unique character strings only. For example, trying to change the word "on" to "at" will also change "only" to "atly," "once" to "atce," and "content" to "cattent." If your spell-checker spots a word that is in fact misspelled or used incorrectly in one place, don't assume that all occurrences of the word are misspelled. For instance, if your spell-checker tells you to capitalize the word "South" (as in "South Carolina") in one instance, the word may not need to be capitalized elsewhere (e.g., "south of the highway"). Check each correction individually.
- To avoid having to make time-consuming repetitive changes to style for such things as paragraph indents or heading style, set up your document using autoformatting for accuracy and consistency throughout your document.
- Non-standard punctuation that may be necessary for a Works Cited or References list (see "Documenting Sources," pages 337–347) or a company name may cause your grammar-checker to mark as erroneous writing that is correct. Check any such writing carefully.

- **The sentences are unclear.** Even after I reread them, I was not sure I understood the writer's message.
- **The sentences are too short and simplistic.** The writing felt "dumbed down."

Writing clear, readable sentences is not always easy. It takes effort, but the time you spend editing will pay off in rich dividends for you and your readers. The seven guidelines that follow should help with the editing phase of your work.

1. **Avoid needlessly complex or lengthy sentences.** Do not pile words on top of words. Instead, edit one overly long sentence into two or even three more manageable ones.

Too long: The planning committee decided that the awards banquet should be held on March 15 at 6:30, since the other two dates (March 7 and March 22) suggested by the hospitality committee conflict with local sports events, even though one of those events could be changed to fit our needs.

Edited for easier reading: The planning committee has decided to hold the awards banquet on March 15 at 6:30. The other dates suggested by the hospitality committee—March 7 and March 22—conflict with two local sports events. Although the date of one of those sports events could be changed, the planning committee still believes that March 15 is our best choice.

2. Combine short, choppy sentences. Don't shorten long, complex sentences, only to turn them into choppy, simplistic ones. When you find yourself looking at a series of short, blunt sentences, as in the following example, combine them where possible and use connective words similar to those italicized in the edited version.

Choppy: Medical transcriptionists have many responsibilities. Their responsibilities are important. They must be familiar with medical terminology. They must listen to dictation. Sometimes physicians talk very fast. Then the transcriptionist must be quick to transcribe what is heard. Words could be missed. Transcriptionists must forward reports. These reports have to be approved. This will take a great deal of time and concentration. These final reports are copied and stored properly for reference.

Edited: Medical transcriptionists have many important responsibilities. *These* include transcribing physicians' orders using correct medical terminology. *When* physicians dictate rapidly, transcriptionists have to keyboard accurately *so* that no words are omitted. *Among their most demanding* duties are keyboarding and forwarding transcriptions *and then, after approval,* storing copies properly for future reference.

3. Edit sentences to tell who does what to whom or what. The clearest sentence pattern in English is the subject-verb-object (s-v-o) pattern.

S V O

Sue booted the computer.

S V O

Our website contains a link to key training software programs.

Readers find this pattern easiest to understand because it provides direct and specific information about the action. Hard-to-read sentences obscure or scramble information about the subject, the verb, or the object. In the following unedited sentence, the subject is hidden in the middle rather than being placed in the most crucial subject position.

Unclear: The control of the ceiling limits of glycidyl ethers on the part of the employers for the optimal safety of workers in the workplace is necessary. (*Who is responsible for taking action? What action must they take? For whom is such action taken?*)

Edited: Employers must control the ceiling limits of glycidyl ethers for workers' safety.

4. Use strong, active verbs rather than verb phrases. In trying to sound important, many bureaucratic writers avoid using simple, graphic verbs. Instead, these writers use a weak verb phrase (for example, *provide maintenance of* instead of

maintain, work in cooperation with instead of *cooperate*). Such verb phrases imprison the active verb inside a noun format and slow readers down. Note how the edited version here rewrites the weak verb phrases.

Weak: The city provided the employment of two work crews to assist the strengthening of the dam.

Strong: The city employed two work crews to strengthen the dam.

5. Avoid piling modifiers in front of nouns. Putting too many modifiers (words used as adjectives) in the readers' path to the noun is confusing for readers, who will have trouble deciphering how one modifier relates to another modifier or to the noun.

Crowded: The vibration noise control heat pump condenser quieter can make your customer happier.

Readable: The quieter on the condenser for the heat pump will make your customer happier by controlling noise and vibrations.

6. Replace wordy phrases or clauses with one- or two-word synonyms.

Wordy: The college has parking zones for different areas for people living on campus as well as for those who do not live on campus and who commute to school. (Twenty-one words of the original sentence—everything after "areas for"—have been reduced to four words: "resident and commuter students.")

Edited: The college has different parking zones for resident and commuter students.

7. Combine sentences beginning with the same subject or ending with an object that becomes the subject of the next sentence.

Wordy: Homeowners want to buy low-maintenance bushes. These low-maintenance bushes include the ever-popular holly and boxwood varieties. These bushes are also inexpensive.

Edited: Homeowners want to buy low-maintenance and inexpensive bushes such as holly and boxwood. (This revision combines three sentences into one, condenses twenty-four words into fourteen, and joins three related thoughts.)

Editing Guidelines for Cutting Out Unnecessary Words

Too many people in business think the more words, the better. Nothing could be more self-defeating. Your readers are busy; unnecessary words slow them down. Make every word work. Cut out any words you can from your sentences. If the sentence still makes sense and reads correctly, you have eliminated wordiness.

1. Replace wordy phrases with precise ones. See how in Table 2.1 wordy phrases on the left are replaced with their much more concise equivalents on the right. Many of these wordy phrases have slowed business writing down for decades.

2. Use concise, not redundant, phrases. Another kind of wordiness comes from using redundant expressions—saying the same thing a second time, only in different words. "Fellow colleague," "component parts," "corrosive acid," and "free gift" are phrases that contain this kind of double speech; a fellow *is* a colleague, a component

TABLE 2.1 Wordy Phrases and Their Concise Equivalents

Wordy	Concise	Wordy	Concise
at a slow rate	slowly	in connection with	about
at an early date	soon	in the event that	if
at this point in time	now	in the month of May	in May
based on the fact	because	in the neighborhood of	approximately, about
be in agreement with	agree	it is often the case that	often
bring to a conclusion	conclude, end	look something like	resemble
come to terms with	agree, accept	of the opinion that	think
due to the fact that	because	on the grounds that	because
during the course of	during	until such time as	until
express an opinion that	affirm	with reference to	regarding, about
for the period of	for	with the result that	so

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is a part, acid *is* corrosive, and a gift *is* free. In the following examples, the suggested changes on the right are preferable to the redundant phrases on the left.

Redundant	Concise
absolutely essential	essential
advance reservations	reservations
basic necessities	necessities, needs
close proximity	proximity, nearness
end result	result
final conclusions/final outcome	conclusions/outcome
first and foremost	first
full and complete	full, complete
personal opinion	opinion
tried-and-true	tried, proven

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3. Watch for repetitious words, phrases, or clauses within a sentence. Sometimes one sentence or one part of a sentence needlessly duplicates another.

Redundant: To provide more room for employees' cars, the security department is studying ways to expand the employees' parking lot.

Edited: The security department is studying ways to expand the employees' parking lot. (*Because the first phrase says nothing that the reader does not know from the independent clause, it can be cut.*)

4. Avoid unnecessary prepositional phrases. Adding a prepositional phrase can sometimes contribute to redundancy. The italicized words in the following list are unnecessary. Be on the lookout for these phrases and delete them.

audible <i>to the ear</i>	light <i>in weight</i>	short <i>in duration</i>
bitter <i>in taste</i>	loud <i>in volume</i>	soft <i>in texture</i>
fly <i>through the air</i>	orange <i>in color</i>	tall <i>in height</i>

hard to the touch
honest in character

rectangular in shape
second in sequence

twenty in number
visible to the eye

Figure 2.8 shows an email that Trudy Wallace wants to send to her boss, Lee Chadwick, about issuing tablets to the sales force. Her unedited work is bloated with unnecessary words, expendable phrases, and repetitious ideas.

FIGURE 2.8 A Wordy, Unedited Email

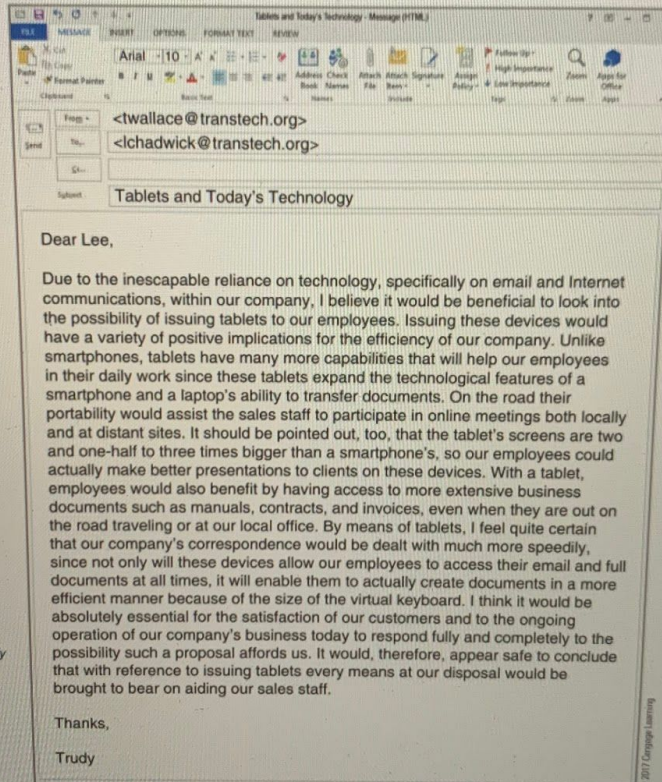
Wordy and unfocused subject

One long, unbroken paragraph is hard to follow

Repeats same idea in two or three sentences

Uses awkward and wordy sentences

Does not specify what writer will do about problem

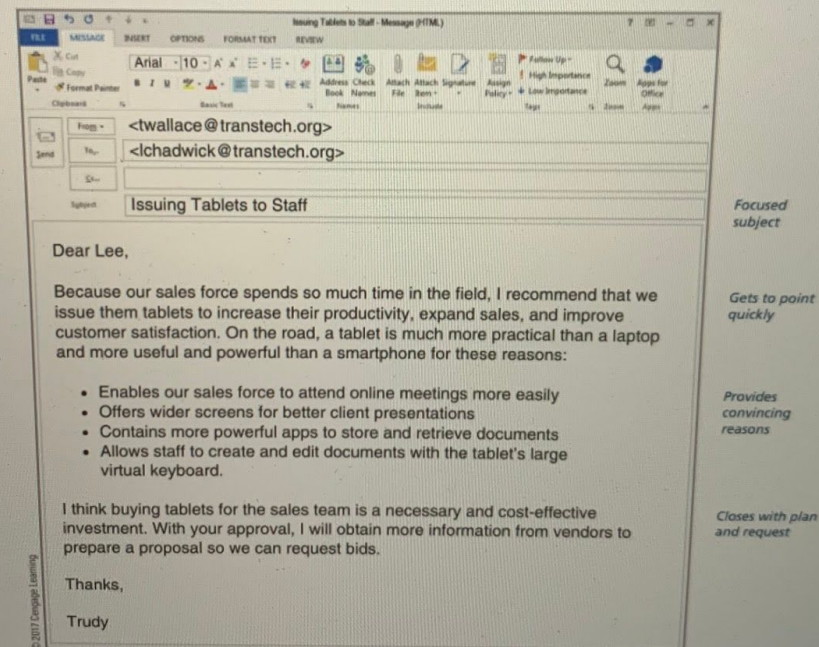


After careful editing, Trudy Wallace streamlined her email (see Figure 2.9). She pruned wordy expressions and combined sentences to cut out duplication. The revised version is only 127 words, as opposed to the 299 words in the draft. Not only has Wallace shortened her message, but she has also made it easier to read.

Editing Guidelines to Eliminate Sexist Language

Editing involves far more than just making sure that your sentences are readable. It also reflects your professional style—how you see and characterize the world of work, your co-workers and customers, not to mention how you want your readers to see you. Your words should reflect a high degree of ethics and honesty, free from bias, offense, and stereotype. They need to be sensitive to the needs of your

FIGURE 2.9 A Concise Version of the Wordy Email in Figure 2.8



international audience as well (see "Ten Guidelines for Communicating with International Readers," pages 169–173).

Sexist language in particular offers a distorted and unethical view of a job force and discriminates in favor of one sex at the expense of another, usually women. It portrays men as having more powerful, higher-paying jobs than women do. Using sexist language offends and demeans female readers by depriving them of their equal rights and it may cost your company business as well. You can avoid gender bias by using inclusive language for women and men alike, treating them equally and fairly.

Sexist language is often based on stereotypes that depict men as superior to women. For example, calling politicians *city fathers* or *favorite sons* follows the stereotypical picture of seeing politicians as male. Such phrases discriminate against women who do or could hold public office at all levels of government. Never assume or imply a person's gender is based on his or her profession.

Sexist Language and Professional Titles

As the above examples show, such language prejudicially labels some professions as masculine and others as feminine. Keep in mind that sexist phrases assume engineers, physicians, and pilots are male (*he*, *his*, and *him* are often linked with these professions in descriptions), while social workers, nurses, administrative assistants, and secretaries are often portrayed as female (*she*, *her*), although members of both sexes work in all these professions. Sexist language also wrongly points out gender identities when such roles do not seem to follow biased expectations—*lady lawyer*, *male secretary*, *female surgeon*, or *male nurse*. Such offensive distinctions reflect prejudiced attitudes that you should eliminate from your writing.

Always prune the following sexist phrases: *every man for himself*, *gal Friday*, *little woman*, *lady of the house*, *old maid*, *women's intuition*, *the best man for the job*, *to man a desk* (or *post*), *the weaker sex*, *woman's work*, *working wives*, *a manly thing to do*, and *young man on the way up*.

Finally, don't assume all employees are male. Instead of writing, "All staff members and their wives are invited to attend," simply say, "All staff members and their guests are invited to attend."

Ways to Avoid Sexist Language

Here are four ways you can eliminate sexist writing from your work.

1. Replace sexist words with neutral ones. Neutral words do *not* refer to a specific sex; they are genderless. The sexist words on the left in the following list can be replaced by the neutral nonsexist substitutes on the right.

Sexist	Neutral	Sexist	Neutral
alderman	representative	chairman	chair, chairperson
assemblyman	representative	common man	average citizen
businessman	businessperson	congressman	representative
cameraman	photographer	craftsman	skilled worker

Sexist	Neutral	Sexist	Neutral
fireman	firefighter	manmade	synthetic, artificial
foreman	supervisor	manpower	strength, power
housewife	homemaker	man to man	candidly
janitress	custodian	policeman	police officer
landlord, landlady	owner	salesman	salesperson
maiden name	family name	spokesman	spokesperson
mailman, postman	mail carrier	weatherman	meteorologist
man-hours	work-hours	women's intuition	intuition
mankind	humanity	workman	worker

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2. Watch masculine pronouns. Avoid using the masculine pronouns (*he, his, him*) when referring to a group that includes both men and women.

Every worker must submit his travel expenses by Monday.

Workers may include women as well as men, and to assume that all workers are men is misleading and unfair to women. You can edit such sexist language in several ways.

- Make the subject of your sentence plural and thus neutral.

Workers must submit their travel expenses by Monday.

- Replace the pronoun *his* with *the* or *a* or drop it altogether.

Every employee is to submit a travel expense report by Monday.

Every worker must submit travel expenses by Monday.

- Use *his* or *her* instead of *his*.

Every worker must submit his or her travel expenses by Monday.

- Reword the sentence using the passive voice.

All travel expenses must be submitted by Monday.

Moreover, in some contexts exclusive use of the masculine pronoun might invite a lawsuit. For example, you would be violating federal employment laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender if you wrote the following in a help-wanted notice for your company.

Each applicant must submit his transcript with his application. He must also supply three letters of recommendation from individuals familiar with his work.

The language of such a notice implies that only men can apply for the position.

Keep in mind that international readers may find these guidelines on avoiding masculine pronouns confusing because many languages (e.g., French, Spanish) follow grammatical gender instead of natural gender. In French, the word for *doctor* is masculine, for example.

- 3. Avoid using sexist words that end in -ess or -ette.** Use gender-neutral alternatives for words like *stewardess* (*flight attendant*), *poetess* (*poet*), *waitress* (*server*).

4. Eliminate sexist salutations. Never use the following salutations when you are unsure of who your readers are:

- Dear Sir
- Gentlemen
- Dear Madam

Any woman you write to would surely be offended by the first two greetings and may also be unhappy with the pompous and obsolete *madam*. It is usually best to write to a specific individual, but if you cannot do that, direct your letter to a particular department or group: *Dear Warranty Department* or *Dear Selection Committee*.

Be careful, too, about using the titles *Miss*, *Mr.*, and *Mrs.* Sexist distinctions are unjust and insulting. It is preferable to write *Dear Ms. McCarty* rather than *Dear Miss or Mrs. McCarty*. A woman's marital status should not be an issue. Try to find out if the person prefers *Ms.* to another courtesy title (e.g., *Editor Hawkins*, *Supervisor Jones*). If you are in doubt, write *Dear Indira Kumar*. Chapter 5 provides acceptable salutations to use in your letters (see "Salutation," pages 159–160).

Avoiding Other Types of Stereotypical Language

In addition to sexist language, avoid any references that stereotype an individual because of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Not only are such references almost always irrelevant in the workplace (except for Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reports or health care documentation, where you still need to respect an individual's identity), they are discriminatory, culturally insensitive, and ethically wrong.

To eliminate biased language in your workplace writing, follow these guidelines.

1. Do not single out an individual because of race or national origin or stereotype him or her because of it. Be especially sensitive when referring to someone's ethnic identity.

Wrong: Bill, who is African American, is one of the company's top sales reps.

Right: Bill is one of the company's top sales reps.

Wrong: The Chinese computer whiz was able to find the problem.

Right: The programmer was able to find the problem.

2. Identify members of an international community accurately. Not every native Spanish speaker is Latin American or Hispanic. Be sensitive to significant cultural differences among groups (Cuban Americans and Mexican Americans, for example).

3. Avoid words or phrases that discriminate against an individual because of age. For example, do not use *elderly*, *up in years*, *geezer*, *old-timer*, *over the hill*, *senior moment*, or the adjectives *spry* or *frail* when they are applied to someone's age: "a spry sixty-seven." Also avoid phrases like *baby engineer* or *middle-aged supervisor*.

Wrong: Jerry Fox, who will be fifty-seven next month, comes up with obsolete plans from time to time.

Right: Some of Jerry Fox's plans have not been adopted.