Writing Skills

Editing and Proofreading

What is the difference between editing and proofreading? There is a distinct difference between the two.

- Editing is the first task that should be undertaken after finishing the first draft of a piece of text. It involves checking the content of the text to ensure that the ideas are expressed clearly and logically. The piece of writing should form a clear and meaningful whole. Editing requires careful analysis and critical thinking.

- Proofreading involves checking over the text in finer detail after the editing stage, to detect errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar and format. Proofreading requires a great deal of attention to detail.

Editing and proofreading both require close and careful reading, but they focus on different parts of your writing and use different techniques.

- Careful editing and proofreading of your writing can improve your overall marks.
- You should have edited and re-drafted your assignment several times before you proofread.
- Once you have done all your editing, then you can proofread your work.

**Editing**

Once you have written your assignment, it is a good idea not to look at it for a few days. Some distance and a fresh mind helps you to view your work more objectively. When you begin editing, read your work a few times and focus on different elements of the assignment with each reading.

Here are some questions to ask yourself:
• Does my essay have a clear introduction, body and conclusion?
• Have I covered all the main points from my plan?
• Is my argument convincing?
• Do I contradict myself at all?
• Is there a logical flow to my writing?
• Have I answered the question?

For each section of the assignment consider the following:

| Introduction | • Have I presented or defined my topic clearly?
|             | • Is my line of argument clearly presented?
|             | • Have I briefly stated what I will write about in the assignment? |
| Body        | • Have I developed my argument throughout the body?
|             | • Are my ideas and paragraphs ordered logically?
|             | • Are there transitional words/sentences between paragraphs?
|             | • Does each paragraph clearly state the main idea of the paragraph?
|             | • Is each paragraph supported with examples and explanations? |
| Conclusion  | • Does my conclusion summarise the key points in my essay?
|             | • Does it link back to the introduction?
|             | • Does it emphasise my argument?
|             | • Have I made sure I have not included any new ideas? |
Check the style

Academic writing style is subjective and different disciplines and academic units have different ideas about what makes a good writing style. However, remember that your goal in academic writing is to communicate your ideas in a clear and understandable manner.

Tips for improving your academic writing style:

| Use a formal style of writing | • Use the readings of your module to get an idea of appropriate language.  
|                              | • Do not use slang, jargon and pretentious language, as this can cloud what you are trying to communicate and confuse your reader.  
|                              | • Avoid using abbreviations and contractions, e.g. write is not rather than isn't. |
| Use impersonal language       | In general avoid using personal language such as I think or I believe unless it is reflective writing. Whatever is included in your assignment that is not attributed to someone else is assumed to be your voice. |

Once you have done all your editing, then you can proofread your work.

Proofreading

The last part of editing your writing is proofreading. This involves checking things like spelling, punctuation, grammar and referencing.

Here are some useful proofreading tips:
- Print your document if you prefer to proofread from a printout rather than on a screen.
- Make sure you have no distractions - shut down your email and social media and turn off your phone.
- Record yourself reading your work and listen back to hear the flow, comprehension and clarity of your writing.
- Download text to speech software on a University workstation to have your work read back to you. Simply select the Additional Software button on the Apps menu and download one of the following programs: Read and Write, ClaroRead Plus, or ClaroLingo.
- Use a ruler or a blank sheet of paper to cover up the lines below the one you are reading. This technique keeps you from skipping ahead of possible mistakes.
- Review comments on past assignments to identify errors that you make repeatedly.
- Read though looking for one type of error at a time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formatting</th>
<th>Check for consistent use of heading styles, font, diagrams, tables, margins.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>• Use the computer search function to find any mistakes you are likely to make. For example search for &quot;it&quot;, if you confuse &quot;its&quot; and &quot;it's.&quot;&lt;br&gt;• Try reading out loud to hear any problems and spot any overly long sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>• Use the spell check on your computer, but remember that a spell checker will not identify mistakes with homophones (e.g., &quot;they're,&quot; &quot;their,&quot; &quot;there&quot;) or particular typing errors (like &quot;he&quot; for &quot;the&quot; or &quot;form&quot; for &quot;from&quot;)&lt;br&gt;• Are you consistently using the US or UK version of a word for example:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Referencing | • Check you are using the recommended referencing style.  
• Are all references presented consistently in the required style?  
• Are all the sources used listed in the bibliography or reference list?  
• Do all in-text references correspond with the end references in the reference list? |

**Further help:**

See the academic writing skills section of our Academic Skills website for advice on academic writing [http://library.soton.ac.uk/sash/academic-writing](http://library.soton.ac.uk/sash/academic-writing)

**You may also find the following helpful:**

Guide to Editing and Proofreading by Oxford Learning Institute, University of Oxford

[https://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/oxfordlearninginstitute/documents/pdg/managingyourself/1_guide-to-editing-and-proofreading.pdf](https://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/oxfordlearninginstitute/documents/pdg/managingyourself/1_guide-to-editing-and-proofreading.pdf)

Purdue Online Writing Lab section on proofreading

[https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/561/1/](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/561/1/)