

# Editing Yourself

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Not everybody has access to a professional editor. Sometimes, you're forced to edit your own writing - a danger some of us know all too well. As soon as you put those words on the paper, you know you're going to have some serious work to do later - and editing your own words can be difficult. Still, there are times when you will have to edit your own writing. Here are some tips:

Organize

Make your piece flow logically. Readers should not have to make an effort to understand your writing. Use simple language and be specific where you can. If you need to rearrange paragraphs or sentences so that your piece makes sense, then by all means do it.

Write Concisely

This means keep your sentences short and avoid clutter. Omit unnecessary words.

Don't be redundant

Avoid redundant phrases like "the sum total."

Don't reveal your outline

Don't say, "I'm going to talk about ..." Just talk about it. Don't say, "I want to take this opportunity to thank ..." Go ahead and thank them. You don't need permission and your readers don't need to be warned.

Avoid using jargon

Keep your audience in mind at all times when editing. Save the jargon for when you and your work buddies talk shop. Otherwise, you risk alienating readers who don't understand your jargon.

Use active voice

Use strong, direct words. The active voice tells who did what. Passive voice avoids specifics.

Examples: The surgery was performed by Dr. Smith.

(passive voice) Change to:

Dr. Smith performed the surgery. (active voice - clearer, stronger)

Use vivid words

Help readers visualize what you are saying. They will retain more if they can picture it in their heads.

Vivid, visual words will paint a picture for them, helping them to "see" what you are saying.

Use plain words with few syllables

Don't try to dazzle your audience with too many big words. The result will be a cluttered piece that is hard to navigate. For example, instead of utilize say use.

Use your grammar and spell checkers with caution

Spell checkers are a great invention, but they're not 100 percent reliable. Grammar checkers are especially suspect since they don't always understand usage. Use them to double-check your editing, but don't trust them completely. They just aren't as reliable as your own brain.

When in doubt, always have another person look at your work. Not everyone has access to a professional editor but I'll bet there's a grammar expert sitting just a few cubicles away from you. Ask her or him for help before finalizing your edits.

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