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Tools for Expression

Editing & Proofreading Checklist

Errors and inconsistencies in your writing distract readers and distort your message. In addition to clarifying your work, thorough editing shows respect for your audience.

This basic checklist is designed for refining an essay or similar composition. Although these steps can be used with other projects, more comprehensive editing and proofreading resources are available in the UnLockWritersBlock.com *Products* section.

After you finish a draft, it's best to put it aside for a couple hours—or better yet, overnight—before you start editing. You may also consider printing out the document's pages. Most people find it easier to review text on paper than on a computer screen.

Many writers are overwhelmed by the thought of refining their work. A great way to overcome this is to use the following sequence and focus on one revision category at a time:

- 1) Content Composition
- 2) Paragraph Structure
- 3) Sentence Structure
- 4) Word Usage
- 5) Proofreading
 - a. Spelling
 - b. Proper Names
 - c. Facts and Figures
 - d. Punctuation

Content Composition

- Does the project have a clear purpose?
- Does the project support your goal?
- Is the main idea well-defined?
- Is the main idea introduced early in the work?
- Does the introduction generate interest in the main idea?
- Does the content support the main idea?
- Is the overall organization style easy to follow?
- Is the main idea summarized in the conclusion?

Paragraph Structure

- Does each paragraph contribute to the logical progression of the project's content?
- Is the main point of each paragraph clear?
- Is each paragraph's main point defined early?
- Does the main point of each paragraph support the project's main idea?
- Does each paragraph's content support its main point?
- Are there smooth transitions from one paragraph to the next?
- Is there a variety of paragraph lengths and structures?

Sentence Structure

Read your sentences in reverse order—from the end of the document to the beginning. This allows you to focus on structure without being distracted by the overall content.

- Are all sentences complete?
- Are the key words at the beginning or the end of each sentence?
- Would any short sentences be more effective if they were combined?
- Would any complex sentences be more effective if broken down into shorter ones?
- Are any sentences too wordy?
- Have active rather than passive verbs been used?
- Are all modifiers in agreement with the words they're supposed to modify?
- Do all verbs agree with their subjects?
- Do all pronouns refer to the correct nouns?
- Is there a variety of sentence lengths and structures?

Word Usage

- Are all words effective?
- Are there extra words that can be eliminated?
- Has excessive repetition of words been avoided?
- Is there a mix of short and long words?

Proofreading

- Has the computer program spell-check been used?
- Has the spelling also been checked with a dictionary?
- Are all proper names correct?
- Have all facts and figures been verified?
- Is all punctuation appropriate and correct?