

Editing - tips for better editing and fact checking

Someone else should edit your copy. It is not a good idea to edit your own content. It is particularly not a good idea to copyedit it. We get too close to our writing. We tend to see what we meant to write, not what is actually on the page.

However the reality is that because of time and cost pressure, you will often end up editing your own work. Here are some tips to help you get a better result if you have to self-edit.

If you have to self-edit

- **Take your time.** If you rush editing you're bound to make mistakes. Allocate at least 30 percent of the overall writing time to editing.
- If you can, **take a break between writing and editing.**
- **Aim for three edits.** At minimum, you need an edit and a copyedit. However, a final read through the content is always advisable. (Some people edit their content 5-10 times.)
- **Use your 'Word Count'.** The word count is one of the greatest tools an editor can have. If you are commissioning content, tell writers you want a specific number of words. When self-editing, set a word count for yourself and stick to it. Never listen to that little voice in your head that pleads for more words.
- **Avoid throwing away your first draft.** Many writers find writing the first draft a difficult and arduous process. The impulse is to throw it away and start again. Don't. Instead, cut it by half. (There will nearly always be good ideas in the first draft.)
- When editing, **change the environment**, for example, print it out; read it aloud; change font size or use double spacing. When we're editing our own writing, we tend to see what we think should be on the page, rather than what is actually there. So, we need whatever device we can find to break that habit.
- **Role play.** Pretend that you have received the copy from someone else. Better still, pretend that you've received it from your worst enemy and that you're going to show them how good content should be written.
- **Edit first for style and tone.** Ask these four questions:
 - Is it necessary?
 - Is it clear?
 - Is there a shorter way to say this?
 - Is there a simpler way to say this?
- **Leave copyediting and fact checking until last.** If you want to do a very thorough copyedit, print the content out. Get a ruler. Go to the end of the content. Read backwards through the text, moving the ruler up each line as you go. It makes the words and punctuation stand out.
- **Copyedit tables, text in pictures, pull quotes, headings, etc., separately.** It's easy to forget this sort of text, so set it as a separate task.
- **Avoid major changes near the end of the editing process.** This is what kills editing. If you've planned your document well, you should not have major changes near the end of the editing process. Avoid them at all costs.
- **Proof your corrections.** This is where many errors are introduced. Make sure your corrections haven't affected the sentence and paragraph they are in.

Tips for fact checking

- Print out the document and physically mark every fact that requires verifying.
- Ask questions such as "Says who?" and "Is the writer really sure about this?"
- If an organisation or brand is mentioned, check the relevant website to verify spelling.
- Avoid using secondary sources to verify facts, as you may be perpetuating an error.
- If you have to use secondary sources, find at least three and make sure they agree.
- Verify phone/fax numbers, web and email addresses. Copy the URL from the document and paste it into a browser. Ring the phone number.
- Make sure your "millions" and "billions" don't get mixed up.
- Don't mix-up your dollars, pounds and euros.