

Editing your Writing

You have worked hard to complete your assessment. Leave time to edit and proofread your work before you submit it. Also taking a break from it for a few days before editing will give you a fresh view. Your lecturer may not talk about the importance of correct punctuation or spelling, but they will notice if there are errors. Fixing typos and factual errors in your work will undoubtedly improve your mark.

Editing vs. proofreading: what is the difference?

Editing involves re-reading to check and improve the content or meaning of your writing. This might mean re-writing sections to improve your line of argument, for example. Think of it as polishing your work of art.

Proofreading is a final check for spelling, punctuation or other errors. When proofreading, you are not necessarily looking at the content or line of argument.

Edit: content

Have you addressed the task?

Clues that show you have addressed the task:

- used words from the question in your introduction
- stated your argument and the points to be covered
- defined any key terms
- demonstrated your understanding of the issue/s

Have you structured your argument?

Your writing needs to be convincing, so consider how your argument flows. Check that you:

- cover all points in a logical sequence
- focus on one point in each paragraph
- begin each paragraph with a topic sentence
- follow each topic sentence with material and evidence that supports it
- avoid unnecessary repetition of ideas
- summarise the main points in a conclusion
- put your argument back in a wider context

Have you supported your argument?

Your argument and ideas need to be evidenced. Check that you have:

- referred to the work of others
- provided references to support each time you have summarised, paraphrased and quoted work by others

Edit: expression

Even award-winning novelists will check their writing for style or expression. Academic writing tends to use a particular word choice, voice (active or passive), and tense (past or present), and the language is often objective and inclusive. Above all, having a consistent

style will give your reader the impression of reliability.

Have you used the active or passive voice?

The passive voice is often used in academic writing when the focus needs to be on the object (e.g. research), rather than the person doing it. Using this style implies objectivity. By contrast, the active voice focuses on the person or thing doing the action, and not the object, so tends to be more direct and dynamic.

Have you used tense consistently?

Sentences can be written in the past, present or future tense, depending on their purpose. Generally, past tense is used to report on things that have already happened, such as experiments, results, or past findings. Present tense is most appropriate when analysing or drawing conclusions about material.

- Past: The plots were measured twice a day...
- Present: The plots indicate that...

Have you checked your word choice?

The main aim of your writing is to communicate ideas as clearly as possible. Using 'big' words for the sake of appearing 'clever' can backfire if your use of them is not quite right. Some categories of words are also best avoided.

- use an equivalent simple word if uncertain
- avoid using "I" statements in your writing unless requested by your lecturer
- avoid using slang, e.g. guys (people), fridge (refrigerator), bucks (dollars)
- remove clichés, overused phrases that do not add anything original, e.g. 'last but not least'

- avoid jargon, technical or specialised words/ phrases used in a particular field (unless permitted)
- delete unnecessary words, e.g., use 'round' instead of 'round in shape', 'summer' instead of 'summer months'
- choose the right words, e.g. do you want 'accept' or 'except'?

Is your language inclusive?

Inclusive language is writing that treats all people fairly. Your writing should not suggest bias or prejudice on the basis of characteristics such as gender, culture, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, age or religion.

- avoid 'mankind' where you refer to 'society' or 'human beings' or 'people'
- avoid using male pronouns ('he', 'his', 'him')

Proofread: punctuation

Look at the 'surface layer' of your writing which primarily includes spelling and punctuation.

- Apostrophes are NOT needed when indicating plural, e.g. tests, books, houses, UNLESS to show ownership (see below)
- Use an apostrophe to show ownership, e.g. the researcher's strategy (one researcher), OR the researchers' strategy (many researchers)
- Do not shorten words by missing out letters; write words in full, e.g., 'It is significant', not 'It's significant'
- Commas to signal a break
- Full stops at the ends of sentences
- Capital letters at the beginning of sentences

Have you turned 'spell-checker' on?

Most word processors have an in-built spelling checker. Generally, typos and other grammatical issues will be indicated by a squiggly coloured line under some words in the text. Check them, and choose Australian English spelling over American where possible.

Have you checked for homophones?

These are words that sound the same, but are spelt differently and have different meanings, such as:

- whether / wether / weather
- course / coarse
- here / hear
- there / their / they're
- sure / shore
- where / wear

Have you checked the material?

- Facts and statistics are clear and correct?
- Names, dates, and quotes match those in your reference list?

Proofread: layout & formatting

Think of the presentation as your essay's suit when it is going for a job interview. It needs to look good. Fortunately there are standards that you can follow.

- Did your lecturer specify a particular format? If in doubt, use font size 12, Times New Roman, and double spaced.
- Are the margins 3-4 cm wide?
- Is the font style and size consistent across the document?
- Have you avoided using bullet points? (Some assignments may allow them – check)
- Do you need a title page or cover page?
- Does your cover page have all your details?
- Have you numbered the pages?

Proofread: citations

Be sure you have used the appropriate style, e.g. APA, MLA, Chicago Note or Australian Harvard.

- Is your reference list accurate and does it only contain material cited in your assignment?
- Are dots or commas used to separate the publication elements in your citation?
- Have you put a single space after the dots or commas in your reference list or bibliography?
- Are titles of the books or journals in italics?

Final check

Listening to your work rather than reading it will provide you with a new perspective. WYNN software allows you to convert your essay into MP3 format so you can hear it spoken aloud. Listen to how it flows and whether it makes sense as a story. WYNN is available on on-campus student computers.

Other helpsheets available

- Writing in an Academic Style
- University Speak