



Learning Centre

A Self-Editing Guide

Editing can help you improve the quality of your academic writing. When you edit, you find opportunities to develop your work further, and you find problems to correct. This handout suggests an approach you can use to maximize the improvement to your paper and minimize the time editing takes.

The best approach for editing is to do it in stages. That way you can focus on the various important issues separately, reducing the chance of missing significant problems and opportunities in your paper. Although that may sound like a lot of work, in fact, each stage is fairly quick because it is so specific.

Have you heard of “Afosep”?

No? Sounds a bit like an ancient Egyptian Pharaoh, doesn't it?

It's actually an acronym to help you remember the order of the stages of the editing process, **AFOSEP**¹.

- **A**ssignment Instructions
- **F**ocus
- **O**rganization
- **S**upport
- **E**ding Language
- **P**roofreading

The rest of this handout explains the stages of AFOSEP, the key questions to consider, and some editing strategies to try for each stage. After you edit for each stage, make any changes to your paper before moving on to the next stage. Editing in this specific order can reduce wasted time and effort.

If you need help to learn more about any of these stages, ask for more information at the Learning Centre.

¹ Adapted with permission from a rubric developed at the Washington State University Writing Center.

AFOSEP

After you have completed a draft of your paper, work through each of the AFOSEP stages below. Indented under the name of each stage are one or more key questions to consider at that stage. In *italics* are suggested editing strategies you can try on your own or with a tutor. Remember to make any revisions called for at one stage before moving on to the next stage.

Assignment Instructions

Does your work fit the assignment instructions?

Reread the instructions and your paper. The most common reason students lose marks is not following instructions!

Focus

Is the main focus of the paper stated clearly?

If you are writing an essay, is the focus stated in a thesis statement with the qualities of a good thesis?

Is there any information in the paper which is not clearly related to the focus? (unity)

After identifying the focus of the paper, read the paper over considering whether each idea is related to the focus. Consider removing parts that do not directly relate to the focus.

Organization

If the assignment instructions require essay structure, does the paper have an introduction, body and conclusion?

Does each paragraph have a topic sentence?

Does each section of the paper clearly link to the thesis or focus of the paper? (unity)

Is each section of the paper clearly linked to the section before it? (coherence)

Are the paragraphs in a logical order? (coherence)

A good strategy for doing this is to make a simple outline from the paper. Identify the thesis and the topic sentences. Look for the links between ideas. Add any missing links. Reconsider the order of ideas.

Support

Is each topic sentence supported by main supporting points and evidence?

Is there sufficient specific evidence (e.g. facts, examples, statistics, description, quotations) for each point?

Does the paper explain the evidence and link it back to the point being supported? A frequent teacher comment in marked papers is “Explain!” or “Develop!”

Are there any gaps or errors in logic which cause the support to be less than convincing?

Are sources of information credible?

Are sources documented?

*Mark up each body paragraph by circling each topic sentence and supporting point. Then, underline the specific evidence for each point. Put a star beside the explanation of the evidence that links it back to the topic sentence. Then consider the key questions for **Support**.*

Editing the language

Are there language errors that make meaning unclear?

Are there language errors that make it difficult for the reader to understand?

Are there mistakes in grammar or word choice?

Are there mistakes in sentence structure or punctuation?

Are there sentences that could be worded more effectively?

- *Get another person to have a look at what you wrote. Ask them to point out any parts that they find difficult to understand.*
- *Read the paper aloud, slowly, to yourself. Listen to the wording. Look harder at any part that sounds awkward or causes you to stumble while reading.*
- *Consider if there are mistakes you commonly make. List your most common types of errors. Go through the paper once looking for each error type. If you don't know how to look, ask a Learning Centre tutor for assistance. They can suggest specific editing strategies for different error types.*

Proofreading

Are there detail errors in citations/bibliography?

Are there formatting errors?

- *Go through all citations checking order of information, capitalization, spacing and punctuation with the style guide.*
- *Revisit the assignment instructions concerning the required format. Check your page setup.*