

Self-Editing Checklist for College Writers

Researching, brainstorming, and drafting are critical for writing an effective paper; however, the difference between an acceptable paper and a great paper is proof-reading and editing. By cultivating proper editing techniques, students can learn from their own mistakes, refine their writing abilities, enhance their argumentation skills, and ultimately earn better grades.

Introduction

- Does your introduction begin with a sentence that grabs the reader's attention?
- Does your paper contain a thesis that is a clear summary of your paper's main point or argument?
- Is your thesis arguable? Your thesis should not simply be the statement of a fact because a statement is NOT arguable.
- Does your thesis match your assignment? A thesis for a compare-contrast paper is constructed differently than a thesis for a personal narrative or a research paper.
- Is your thesis placed correctly? Normally the thesis should be the last sentence of your introductory paragraph.
- Does your thesis provide a clear outline for the entirety of your paper?
- Does your thesis answer a question? Keep in mind, a thesis should never be written as a question.

Body

- Does the topic sentence of each body paragraph summarize the entirety of the points that paragraph covers? (See [Controlling Idea/Topic Sentence handout](#))
- Does each topic sentence correspond with your thesis statement?
- Does all of the information in your paragraph support your topic sentence?
- Does each body paragraph appear in the same order presented in your thesis statement or preview statement?
- Is the final sentence in each body paragraph a sentence that either summarizes the paragraph or transitions to the next point?

Entire Paper

Sentence Composition

- Have you removed unnecessary hedges that weaken your arguments such as *probably*, *might be*, *somewhat*, or *kind of*?
- Have you removed unnecessary words that do not add to the sentence such as *really* or *a lot*?
- Have you varied your vocabulary by utilizing a thesaurus and dictionary when necessary in order to avoid repetition or incorrect word choices?
- Are your sentences of varied lengths and complexities? A paper is stronger when it has a mixture of sentences versus all short sentences or all long sentences.

- Are all transitions from one idea to another smooth and clearly explained, so the reader does not need to make any leaps in logic?
- Has all slang and conversational language been removed? The exception is when writing a personal narrative where this type of language may be appropriate.
- Have you removed any offensive language, such as gender-based or biased language?

Verbs

- Do your verb tenses match the academic discipline of the assignment? Past tense is used for History, present tense for Literature, and present tense for most sciences except in the methods section of lab reports where past tense is used. (See [Verb Tenses handout](#))
- Are your verb tenses consistent?
- Have you replaced unnecessary ‘to be’ verbs (be, been, is, are, were, was) with stronger verbs?
- Are you using ‘active’ verbs? Passive verbs are acceptable only when the object requires emphasis in a sentence. (See [Guide to English Grammar handout](#))

Formatting

- Are the margins, page numbers, titles, line spacing, bibliographic information, etc. formatted correctly as specified by MLA, APA, or a style indicated by your instructor?
- Have you selected a title that will interest and engage the reader? Hint: a restatement of the assignment, such as “Argumentative Essay,” is not a wise choice.

Integration of Information

- Are all of your quotes and paraphrases correctly cited in the assigned citation style, both in-text and in a final Works Cited, Reference, or Bibliography page? (See [Citation Styles academic links](#))
- Are all of your quotes introduced and explained properly?
- Is all of your information, such as quotes and data, pertinent to your topic? Does your information correspond with the topic sentence of your current paragraph?

Grammar and Mechanics

- Check all of the lists within sentences to ensure they are parallel. Items within the list should all be nouns, verbs of the same tense, adjectives, etc.
- Do your pronouns agree with the antecedents they are replacing? (See [Pronoun Antecedent Agreement handout](#).)
- Is your paper free of fragments and run-on sentences?
- Is your paper properly punctuated? If you want to be clear about how to use a specific punctuation mark, refer to our [Helpful Handouts](#).
- Is your paper free of spelling errors?
- Have you read through your paper out-loud (slowly) in order to catch errors that you would miss otherwise?