



# ACADEMIC WRITING: STUDENTS' TOOLKIT

## ACADEMIC WRITING FOR STUDENTS

### What's in it for me?

Writing actually promotes learning. As you write for a particular subject, even on an informal basis, you are

- a) **cementing** the **information** in your brain,
- b) **learning** to **communicate effectively** in that subject and
- c) **preparing** to **face communication challenges** for the future – for tertiary study and/or for the workplace.

Just as your muscles need exercise to develop, so does your brain. Academic Reading (which you have been practising for some time now) and Academic Writing both help to strengthen the connections in your brain and make them work faster.

**Academic Reading** requires you to interpret words written by someone else, but

**Academic Writing** trains your brain to generate ideas and communicate them effectively.

Your teachers will be assigning writing-to-learn tasks in lessons and these will help you to achieve all of the above.

### Make sure you

- **Use pen and paper** (research shows that handwriting in **pen** helps to stimulate the neurons in the brain and therefore helps you to retain information and develop your ideas).
- **Keep your laptop closed** (no distractions and no possibility of researching the internet to get ideas. You must use your own ideas).
- **Use your own words** rather than copying from a text, a PowerPoint or from the board.

This means you will be exercising your brain and developing the skills you need.

Keep in mind the six (+ one) important elements of any piece of writing. They are

### Ideas

### ORGANISATION

### Voice

### Word Choice

### SENTENCE FLUENCY

### Conventions

### + Presentation

You can use the acronym **VIP COWS** to remember them. They are all equally important. What follows are some **tricks** and **tips** to ensure you address each one.

# Ideas

## Step 1. BRAINSTORM

Never leave this step out! Brainstorming means just letting all your ideas flow onto the page, without censoring or judging. As you write, you will think of new ideas that may be useful for your writing task. **Draw arrows, colour-code or use symbols to link ideas together.**

There are myriad forms of brainstorming – choose the process that works best for you. You can

Create a mind map

Use a Venn diagram

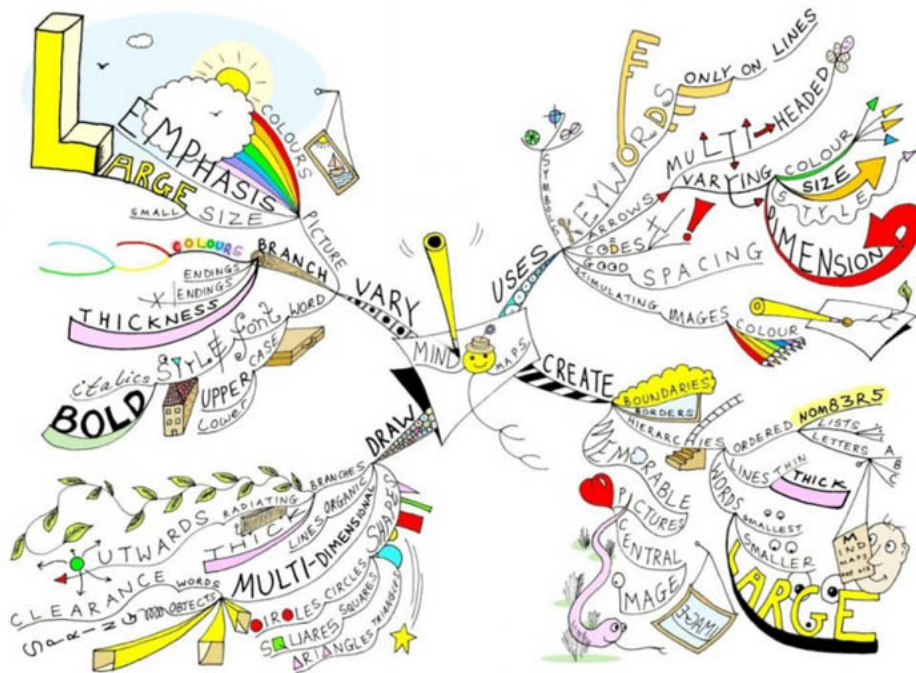
Create shapes on the page with ideas in each one

Create a table

Develop a PMI chart

Write a list

Just write all over the page as you think of ideas



## Step 2: Select the BEST ideas FOR THE TASK

You now have a lot of ideas on the page, some of which are interesting, **some of which are not**. Your job is to choose **ONLY** the ideas that are the **most appropriate for the task**. Be careful! Don't be tempted to include ideas that may be exciting or interesting but which are **not relevant** for the task.

What questions should you ask yourself in order to choose the best ideas?

Q: Is this idea **directly related** to the **topic**? **NO? CROSS IT OUT!**

Q: Is it also **absolutely relevant** to the **question or task** that I am being asked to address?

**NO? CROSS IT OUT!**

## ORGANISATION

### How to PLAN



So now you have some great ideas that are relevant to your task, but how best to organise them so that they have the most impact on your reader?

Firstly, if you are writing a non-fiction piece, you need to make the ideas into clear **POINTS** and ensure you have a clear **ARGUMENT**, **THEME** or **THESIS** (depending on the genre)

1. Ensure you know the correct **STRUCTURE** for the **GENRE** in which you are being asked to write (e.g. essay, narrative, persuasive letter, etc.)

**CHECK THE WRITING AND CITING E-GUIDE TO REMIND YOU OF GENERIC CONVENTIONS.**

2. If it is an **ESSAY, PERSUASIVE PIECE, REPORT OR OTHER NON-FICTION PIECE OF WRITING**,
  - a) make a decision about the **ORDER** of the points you are going to make.

### What questions will you ask yourself about the organisation of your points or ideas?

**Q: Why will I put them in this order?**

**Q: Is this the best way of making the writing FLOW (i.e. do the ideas lead from one to another logically and effectively)?**

**Q: Have I ordered them in a way that will have the maximum impact on my reader?**

- b) Decide what you need to include in each section of your writing (i.e. what goes into your introduction? What goes into the body of your piece? What goes into the conclusion?
  - c) **PLAN** your paragraphs. Remember to use the **PEEEL** structure. Check that your topic sentences make a clear **POINT** and that the elaboration, evidence and evaluation **SUPPORT** your point.
3. If it is a **NARRATIVE PIECE**, decide how you will structure it in terms of the **orientation, build-up of tension, climax and resolution**.

**Q: How will I engage my reader with a sizzling start? Will I start with a moody description of the setting, or begin with dialogue, describe a character's actions...?**

**Then**

**Q: Which ideas will go into building the tension (conflict)?**

**Q: What will be the climax and how will it be resolved?**

Create a **plot graph** and list these ideas on them so you are ready to begin your writing.

**Connectives and transition phrases.** These are an **essential** component of any piece of writing in order to make the writing flow. See attached for a list.

## *Voice*

This is the **HEART** of your writing. It is what will set you apart from other writers. It is your unique personality emerging through the words. It is strongly linked to your **word choice** (see next section) and if you want to ensure your reader is moved by your writing, you need to bring life and energy to your text, demonstrating a passion for the topic and a connection to your audience.

How to find your own *Voice?*

### Ask yourself:

**Q: What kind of identity do I want to come through this piece of writing?**

A: Choose vocabulary, sentence structures and expressions that contribute to creating a personality behind the writing.

**Q: How do I want my reader to FEEL?**

A: Use emotive language (don't overdo it in an essay – be subtle) to encourage your reader to experience the emotion you want them to feel.

**Q: How can I create PASSION in my writing?**

A: Use powerful adjectives and adverbs to instil a sense of energy and life in your writing.

A: Make your point of view very firmly and try to express it in an original way.



## Word Choice

Word choice means so much more than just having a giant vocabulary bank at your disposal.

Although it is very important to have a wide vocabulary, the most important element of this trait is selecting the **BEST** words for the **EFFECT** you want to create.

### Ask yourself:

**Q: What effect DO I want to create?**

**Q: What words will best help create this effect (of course, this is linked to voice)**

Check the genre to ensure you are writing in the correct REGISTER. This is a scale from FORMAL to INFORMAL.

An essay, of course, needs to use formal language.

A feature article may use a less formal register throughout, or in certain places for effect.

A character in a narrative may use slang or colloquial language.

A scientific report will require subject-specific vocabulary.

**Q: What narrative point of view is appropriate?**

**Q: What tense should I be using?**

**Q: if it is a fictional text, feature article or persuasive text, what mood do I want to create at various points?**

**Q: What tone do I want to adopt?**

**Q: Is jargon appropriate?**

**Q: What subject-specific vocabulary could I be using to demonstrate my understanding?**

**Q: What words, phrases or techniques (such as persuasive techniques) can I use to**

- Shock/surprise my reader
- create an image in my reader's mind
- persuade my reader
- encourage my reader to feel an emotion?

See the final pages of this booklet for a list of moods and tones.



## SENTENCE FLUENCY

This is the **rhythm and flow** of the language and word patterns. Try to write sentences that will sound wonderful when read out loud.

It is important to vary your sentence structure. Check your understanding of simple, compound and complex sentences and how to construct them for maximum effect. Can you identify the sentence types of the following?

The hungry student ate a huge, delicious lunch.

The hungry student ate a huge, delicious lunch but he still felt ravenous.

Despite eating a huge, delicious lunch, the hungry student still felt ravenous.

### Practice:

Take these two-word sentences and see if you can make a variety of sentence types where the two words still retain the central meaning.

Chocolate soothes.

Studying worked.

Dreams inspire.

## Conventions

Conventions are the mechanical correctness of your writing – **spelling, grammar, capitalisation, paragraphing and punctuation.**

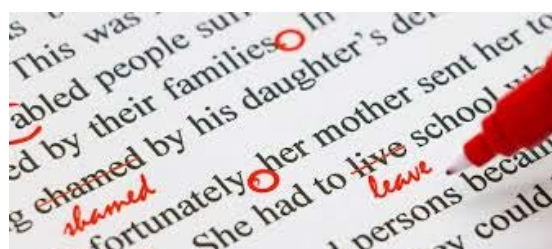
**See the final section of this booklet for how to proofread and edit these aspects of your writing.**

## Plus .... Presentation

This trait means the layout and formatting if your final piece is typed, and the handwriting if relevant. It means the general visual appeal of your piece.

**N.B. YOU MUST BE PREPARED TO WRITE, RE-WRITE, RE-WRITE, EDIT, RE-WRITE, PROOFREAD, RE-WRITE, ASK FOR SOMEONE'S OPINION, RE-WRITE.....**

**EFFECTIVE WRITERS SPEND 75% OF THEIR TIME RE-WRITING THEIR FIRST DRAFT**



## Connectives and Transition Words and Phrases

Words and phrases that connect and make logical transitions between **sentences**, **paragraphs**, and **sections**.

### 1. To support, add or continue:

Besides	Also	Too (after your point)	In addition	Finally
First (ly)	Second/third(ly)	Moreover	Next Again	Similarly
Further	Another	In a like manner	In the same way	Equally important
Furthermore	Likewise		Last/Lastly	Equally importantly

### 2. To compare and contrast:

Also	Unlike	Have in common	All are	Like
Just as	In spite of	Compared to	Although	Similar(ly)
In the same manner/way	And	In contrast	In a like manner	Whether or not
Both	Likewise	Despite	Contrasting	Conversely
As well as	On the other hand	Besides	However	Even though
In the same way	Yet	The same as	On the contrary	Nevertheless
	Rather than	As opposed to	But	Whereas
		Instead	While	

### 3. To introduce details or exemplify:

For example	In fact	For instance	In any event	As stated in / by
In this case	In support of	As evidence	To illustrate	According to
In any case			As a result	Such as

### 4. To show cause and effect:

Since	Because of	Due to	Therefore	Caused by
Thus	To this end	As a result (of)	Hence	For this reason
This results in	Consequently	Accordingly	In effect	Leads to
Brought about	Made possible	As might be expected	Was responsible for	If ... then
				When..... then

### 5. To counter

Obviously many people believe... But Evidently others feel... Yet Clearly, opponents maintain... However	Surely most want... By contrast Even though some people support... It's unlikely that Although citizens argue... I question	Society favours ... On the contrary The (This) idea deserves some merit... Nevertheless
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**6. To indicate order, sequence or importance**

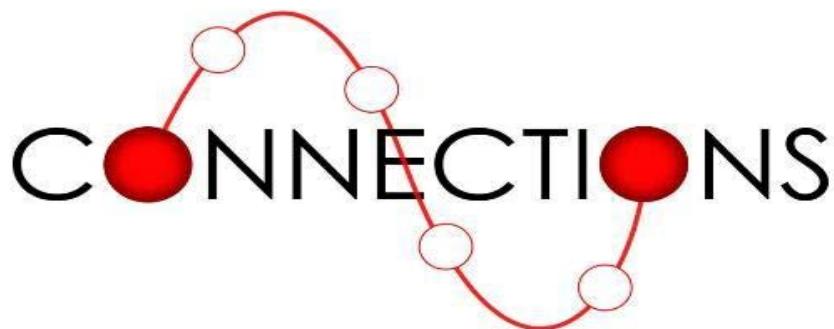
First (ly) Moreover At the same time Finally Lastly Presently Sooner or later	Second /third (ly) Meanwhile Most important Last of all Of greater (est) importance	Later For one reason Meanwhile In the first place Next To begin with
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**7. To show chronological order**

After Earlier Later While In the meantime When	Finally Next As soon as Then Moments later Meanwhile	Since At first Soon Before At the same time First/Second/Third(ly)	At last Until Formerly Afterward In the beginning (end) During
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**8. To conclude**

As noted above Undoubtedly Unquestionably	In other words Obviously Without question	To be sure In any event Without a doubt	In short In any case On the whole
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# Editing and Proofreading Tips for Writers

These editing and proofreading tips are divided into six logical sections, including:

- ✍ Habits
- ✍ Practical Processes
- ✍ The Bigger Picture
- ✍ Sentence-level Editing
- ✍ Formatting
- ✍ Don't Forget!

## Habits

*The first category, habits, includes general actions you should do regularly for effective editing and proofreading of ANY KIND OF WRITING.*

### 1. Sleep on it and PRINT IT OUT.

If you've been living with a manuscript for a long time, you lose objectivity. Editing and proofreading require a clear, objective mind. One way to get that state of mind is to sleep on it. Never try to do all your editing and proofreading in one day. Get a good night's sleep and return to the manuscript the next day. Even for a short document, **PRINT IT OUT** and look at it again the next day. Errors will be more likely to jump out at you.

### 2. Look over the document at different times of day.

It can be helpful to take a look at your piece again the next day at night. Vary the times you re-read your writing; it'll feel like a different document and you'll see new elements.

### 3. Read your writing out loud.

When you're reading silently, your eyes can jump over the words on the page. This means you can miss errors or fail to realise your sentences are actually missing words. To edit properly, you need to read your writing out loud and listen to how it sounds. Your tongue won't say a word that's wrong or missing, and your ears will catch the mistake. As well, any sentences that you find difficult to say out loud may be difficult for your readers. Fix those sentences.

### 4. Keep an error list.

It's helpful to keep a running list of your common types of writing errors. Some writers always miss the difference between "it's" and "its," or they write "effect" when they mean "affect." If you are consistently making an error, write it down. Then when you get to the editing stage, search for it using the find feature in your word processor if it's a typed piece. This way you'll correct the error and develop the awareness required to permanently banish it from your drafts.

### 5. Keep a list of difficult words nearby.

Certain words always trouble us. Some people can never quite get "reminisce" right on the first try. They always forget whether it's "modelling" or "modeling"? To save time, create a list of words that you find difficult and keep it by your side when you edit.

## **6. Give it time.**

Some writers devote little time in their schedules to editing and proofreading. The writing goes on forever, while the editing and proofreading becomes compressed into a few hours. You cannot catch errors, however, when you're rushing through it. Schedule lots of time for the process.

## **7. Use a style guide from the beginning.**

Before you start drafting, determine your style guide. Use the Marist Writing and Citing e-guide. This will help you ensure consistent spelling, capitalisation, and formatting right from the start. That way you don't have to spend hours at the end changing all of these element

## **8. Print it out in a different layout.**

The traditional double-spaced, single-column layout in your word processor is not always the best way to proofread. We're so used to it, but our eyes have to follow lines all the way across. That's why it's helpful to change the layout size or use double columns to make the width of a line shorter. This can help you see errors better.

## **9. Avoid distractions when proofreading.**

Distractions will ruin your proofreading session. If you've got a sibling running around or a conversation between friends going on behind you, it's almost impossible to concentrate. Find a quiet place and cut off access to the Internet and email. Checking emails or social media all the time pulls you out of the proofreading moment and then it takes time to rebuild your focus.

## **10. Be consistent in your changes.**

During editing, sometimes writers make changes to some part of a document but not all. They may capitalise correctly on the first page but forget late pages. Be consistent in the changes you make – if you change the style of something on page one, make sure you change the style of a similar thing on all pages.

## **11. Get trusted people to read your writing.**

Some people – particularly students – seem to think writing should be a solitary act. But in reality, you should share your drafts with a trusted friend/parent/teacher to get opinions and suggestions.

## **12. Don't edit too much while you're drafting.**

While editing is important, it's best left until after you get all your ideas on the page. Write your first draft without judging it.

## **13. Proofread and edit other people's work.**

A way to develop your editing and proofreading eye is to edit other people's work. This is a good opportunity to develop a relationship with an editing buddy. Share your work with each other regularly to improve it and also keep your editing and proofreading eyes sharp.

## **14. Use Track Changes in Word when editing.**

The *Track Changes* feature in Microsoft Word highlights any changes you've made to the document while preserving the original text. This way you can revert back to original phrasing if you change your mind. Always turn this feature on and you won't become so scared about changing your phrasing permanently.

## **15. Use a red pen when proofreading.**

When you're typing in changes from a proofreading session, you may miss some of your mark-up suggestions if you used a pencil or black pen. Try using a red pen, and the corrections will glare at you – they will be impossible to miss.

### **16. Read other people's great writing.**

Read more excellent writing. Choose really well-written books or magazine articles. Reading great writing is one way to see how to edit your own work. You'll see new options for recasting sentences. You'll find inspiration for new ideas.

### **17. Read a good grammar book or online grammar site.**

Grammar books aren't the most interesting reading material. But a review of a grammar book or online site once in awhile will help develop your knowledge of possible errors. It also keeps your editing mind fresh, as you remind yourself of what you're looking for. This one is excellent:

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/>

### **18. Work that muscle.**

Find ways to keep your editing and proofreading muscle strong. Professional athletes know they must practise almost every day to stay fit and coordinated. It's no different with editing and proofreading. When you get away from doing these tasks, you lose some of your sense for errors.

### **19. Assume the mistake is throughout your whole document.**

The first instance of specific mistake could be a sign of more to come. Indeed, the specific mistake may exist all over the document. Pause your editing and select the find feature in your word processor. Enter the error word or phrase and search the whole document. Get it out completely before you move on.

## Practical Processes

*The following practical processes are specific actions you can do to increase your editing and proofreading effectiveness.*

### **20. Read your sentences in reverse order.**

Catching errors can be challenging if you've read the document a few times already. That's because your mind knows what's coming next (or at least, what your brain thinks comes next). A trick to find a fresh perspective and see sentences anew is to reverse the order: read the last sentence, then the second-last sentence, then the third-last sentence, and so on.

### **21. Proofread your sentences SLOWLY.**

When proofreading, there's a tendency to rush because you feel near completion, but that's a mistake. Even though you can see the end coming, it's important to read **slowly**. That means seeing every word, digesting every sentence. Look over sentences at least twice just to be sure.

### **22. Look for one type of problem at a time.**

Don't go into editing or proofreading attempting to find every problem in one pass. It's hard for our brains to remember a long list of editing and proofreading categories. Instead, make multiple passes through the document. For example, you could choose to look only for sentence structure or only for punctuation. This approach keeps your mind focused. If you look for every possible error in one pass, you're more likely to miss errors.

### **23. Edit the big stuff first, small stuff second.**

Avoid checking spelling or changing around sentences at the start of the editing process. Those micro aspects of your writing can be reviewed after you've taken care of the big stuff. Big stuff may be plot, characterisation, argument, order of points, and so on. Why care about a misspelled word when you may end up deleting the paragraph altogether or completely rephrasing it?

### **24. Academic footnotes and endnotes need love too.**

In academic papers, the footnotes and endnotes get shunted off to the bottom of the page or the end of the paper. Given the small font size (usually 9 or 10 point), they can be hard to proofread. Consider increasing the font size just for the proofreading process, and then convert them back.

### **25. Keep a checklist of elements to review.**

This is a long list of tips, and surely you'll forget many of them during the editing process. That's why it's important to keep a list of elements to check. Then write a check mark next to each one as you finish it. This creates a sense of accomplishment.

### **26. Turn off full justification while proofreading.**

When editing and proofreading, turn off the full justification feature in your word processor that pushes text flush up against the right margin. When you use full justification, you can't see extra spaces (which should be deleted). Also, you don't see the lines as unique entities with unique lengths, which affects your editing vision.

### **27. Use a ruler when proofreading.**

Our eyes sometimes lose track of where we are on the page, and we see other sentences in our vision. That's when it's helpful to use a ruler in the editing process. Place the ruler below the sentence you're editing – you'll have perfect focus on those words.

### **28. Re-read your CHANGES.**

The worst thing you can do when typing in editing or proofreading changes is adding new errors. Usually these are typos as our fingers hit the wrong keys. If we're not careful, we can move on to the next change without noticing the new mistake.

### **29. Read syllables, not words.**

Longer words have three or often four syllables. It's easy for your eyes to skip over those syllables, compressing the word down and missing errors (a letter in the middle of the word may be incorrect). On longer words then, slow down and read out each syllable. That way you'll see if all the parts are correct.

## The Bigger Picture

*These macro-level tips help you get your writing in order before attending to the finer details.*

### **30. Orientate your reader at the beginning.**

In fiction writing, there's a concept of locating. Make sure your stories orientate the reader immediately – where are the characters? What is the situation? If the characters just begin talking, without context, the reader may feel confused. It's the same with academic or research-based writing. People want to know the purpose of this writing fairly quickly. Give it to them.

### **31. Take care with your introductions.**

With just about any introduction to any kind of writing, you need to entice and attract (“hook”) the reader immediately. Don’t delay! If you find you want to move into the subject matter a bit more gradually, draw the reader in with a provocative statement in the first sentence or two.

### **32. Do more research.**

During the editing stage of research-based writing, you may suddenly discover an underdeveloped section. The easy way out is to tell the reader, “future work should examine X, Y, or Z.” But you may need to deal with those topics in your paper. Ensure you understand whether the task needs broader evidence. Making it more complete will naturally require more research. This takes time, but it’s worth it.

### **33. Ensure the piece has a ‘spine’.**

A spine in writing is some element that unifies all the paragraphs of the document, the way your spine holds you up. The spine is the argument/hypothesis in a non-fiction paper or a plot in a story. The spine helps you decide what to include and exclude. Without a spine, academic papers and stories become random collections of research and storylines. Make sure everything you write is there to flesh out the spine.

### **34. Cut out the parts that aren’t working.**

Cutting is challenging work because often we are wedded to our writing. We think our phrasing is great or our ideas are priceless. But objective readers may disagree. Don’t force phrases or ideas into your writing when they don’t quite fit the argument or stream of thought. Remove them and consider them the spark for a new piece of writing.

### **35. Cut unnecessary repetition.**

When looking at your document as a whole, check that you are not simply repeating the same point. For a persuasive piece this may be effective at times, but you need to drive your message forward. Repeating yourself is a waste of your word limit. Cut repetition that serves no purpose.

### **36. Determine whether the document has a consistent tone and register.**

Tone is vital to your approach as a writer. Some writers confuse readers by combining a serious tone about a subject with a comedic tone. Register is also an important part of your writing. Some writers write informally when a formal register is required throughout (as in an analytical essay). Stay consistent.

### **37. Make sure you have evidence for your arguments.**

Academic writing such as essays or persuasive pieces should contain arguments. But sometimes writers don’t argue anything – they just present the facts. In these and other kinds of writing, an opinion or argument or point is not enough. Your writing requires evidence. This evidence convinces through reason.

### **38. Fine tune your arguments by recognising your opposition.**

If you’re writing an argumentative piece, it’s important to recognise your opposition’s arguments. This allows you to present what the other person is saying, and then sharpen your own arguments so that you can refute their point/s.

### **39. Bring together scattered thematic parts and avoid contradictions.**

In your writing, it can be easy to lose track of when and where you said something. Microsoft Word provides one page at a time on the screen, you may write about the same theme in many places in a long document. That's why it's important to look at the whole document thematically. See if you're writing about the same themes in different locations. If so, bring them together into one section. Ensure you don't contradict yourself from in different sections.

## Sentence-level Editing

*Now let's turn to the micro-level of editing: the sentences and words. This set of tips helps you recast sentences, making them tighter and clearer.*

### **40. Remove dead verbs.**

Verbs are the most important words in a sentence. They move the writing along and bring it to life. However, we often fall back into dead verbs – words that have no movement. The most common dead verbs are the various forms of “to be”: is, are, was, were. What images or actions do these “to be” forms bring to mind? None. They always require more words to make meaning, so they're inherently wordy. When possible, replace dead verbs with strong verbs: for example, gallop, stroll, dash or wander instead of ‘walk’.

### **41. Weed the garden for wordiness and redundancy.**

Some writers write wordy first drafts. Go back through your draft and see if you can remove words, phrases, and even whole sentences to tighten up your writing. This makes your piece more engaging for the reader: the reader gets to the point faster.

It may be difficult to see wordiness in your own work. Sometimes it's as small as phrases like “in order to” or “the fact that.” Sometimes it may look like this: “the paddle board is long in size” (if you say it's long, there's no need for “in size”).

### **42. Focus your paragraphs.**

Many rough drafts contain paragraphs with no focus. Each successive sentence is on a different topic, and readers find this hard to follow. The sentences of a paragraph should all relate to a single point. Often this single point is expressed in the first sentence of the paragraph (the topic sentence). It can be helpful to write down the point in a column or margin next to the paragraph. Then examine each sentence and make sure it fits. If the sentence doesn't fit the point, remove it and place it in a more appropriate paragraph, or delete it altogether.

N.B. If you've done your planning properly, this won't be necessary at all.

### **43. Make sure most sentences have just one idea.**

Readers can't process many ideas simultaneously. That's why it's best to have only one idea per sentence. The full stop provides a rest, and then you can state another idea in the next sentence.

### **44. Check that verb tenses are consistent.**

Some writers have a problem with changes in verb tenses. One second they're writing in the present tense; the next second they're writing in the past. It can. As a result, the writer moves incorrectly back and forth between the tenses, as staying in one requires strong mental concentration. Check every verb. Are the tenses really consistent?



#### **45. Look out for words that sound the same but are spelled differently.**

Homophones are words that sound the same but are spelled differently. Common ones include principal/principle, right/write, currant/current, draft/draught, and so on. When we're writing, it's easy for our fingers to spit out one when we mean the other. Author Bill Bryson has a wonderful book called *Dictionary of Troublesome Words* that lists many of these. Study these lists of words and watch out for them in your writing.

#### **46. Check for the consistent spelling of names.**

A common error that pops up in the proofreading stage is incorrect spelling of names. So the author spells the person's name one way at the beginning, and another way in the middle. Go back and review names to make sure they are correct and consistent across the whole document. Getting names right respects people.

#### **47. Paraphrase quotations unless they are absolutely brilliant.**

If you've got a quotation in your writing like "In the third quarter, the revenues jumped 36% from the last quarter," paraphrase it. This is a boring quote, and quotes should be reserved for fascinating language.

#### **48. Turn general language into specific language.**

Readers love specifics. Specifics in writing are found in the interesting details you include. If you find yourself writing generalities all the time ("He was a nice man" or "The weather was very good that summer") stop and rethink your language. Provide specific details (What makes the man nice? What was the weather actually like that summer?).

#### **49. Use nouns more often than pronouns.**

To avoid repetition, writers turn to pronouns (small words that replace nouns: it, he, she, they). But sometimes these pronouns become overused and confusing. For example, if you have two men described in a paragraph, and then you mention the pronoun "he" (as in, "he left the room"), the reader becomes confused. This is called faulty pronoun reference. Using nouns as much as possible (without overdoing it) can eliminate such confusion.

#### **50. Vary the lengths and types of your sentences.**

Have you ever listened to a monotonous speaker? The person drones on and on. Well, that's the feeling readers have when every one of your sentences is the same length. Good writers mix up the lengths and structures of their sentences to keep monotony away.

#### **51. Be consistent with contractions.**

Check with your style guide on whether to use contractions. In formal academic writing, words like "it's" or "can't" are spelled out fully as "it is" or "cannot." In a narrative or less formal piece of writing, this can be fine.

#### **52. Use extremely short sentences for emphatic points.**

Extremely short sentences can be very powerful if you want to hammer home a single point. Look through your writing for opportunities to add in a sentence of up to 6 words that concludes a section of writing. Readers will not forget that point.



### **53. Be careful with jargon.**

Words that are specific to certain fields or human endeavours are called jargon. Jargon is okay if you're speaking to an audience that would understand it. But sometimes writers use jargon as a way to show off or suggest they are better than their readers. If you must use jargon with a general audience, explain the terms in everyday language.

### **54. Avoid clichés.**

Writing in an original way is hard work. It's much easier to just write down some old, well-worn phrases: "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," "It's raining cats and dogs," and "He's as strong as an ox" are time-worn and unoriginal. Increase your awareness of clichés by reading cliché databases on the web. If you use clichés, you're marking yourself as an unoriginal writer. Good editors will spot you a mile away (yes, that's a cliché).

### **55. Show rather than tell.**

The classic writing mantra, "show; don't tell" reminds writers to give readers all the details of sight, sound, touch, smell, and feel. Rather than writing "My dog smelled bad", try "My dog smelled like an old sweaty gym sock" to invite readers to experience it for themselves.

### **56. Choose strong nouns over weak nouns.**

In the same way some verbs are stronger in imagery than others, some nouns are stronger than others. When you imagine the word "dog" you see in your mind's eye a generalized dog. But when you imagine the word "pit bull" you see in your mind's eye a very specific dog. Go through your writing and look for generalized or weak nouns and replace them with specific or strong nouns.

### **57. Write mostly in the active voice.**

Active voice describes a straightforward way of ordering your words. Simply put, you write the "doer" of an action first, the action second, and (optionally) the receiver of the action. For example: "John threw the ball." This is a classic active voice sentence.

Passive voice, on the other hand, is more complicated, and this makes it more difficult to read. A passive voice word order would go like this: "The ball was thrown by John." It requires more words, and it places the "doer" of the action last, an unnecessary delay.

### **58. Take time to look only at your punctuation.**

Punctuation deserves special attention when proofreading. Do a quick review of basic punctuation rules before you proofread (hint: look at semi-colons, which are commonly misused). Ensure at the very least that you have boundary punctuation correct. (Does the sentence begin with a capital letter? Does it finish with the correct punctuation mark?) Also, word processors will often format pasted text incorrectly. Fixing those little problems develops your eye for detail.

### **59. Look carefully at apostrophes.**

Ensure you know how to use these properly. Check a grammar book or website and look at all contractions (if you are writing informally, you can sometimes use contractions) and possessives, or places where letters are missing (e.g. nine o'clock).

### **60. Be consistent with capitalisation.**

Writers may forget capitalisation rules as they move through a document. Check exactly what needs capitalisation and what doesn't. Be consistent with capitalisation, particularly in headings and subheadings.

### **61. Check for missing quotation marks.**

In writing out quotations, it's important to get the text exactly right. But sometimes writers forget to finish the quote with the second quotation mark. Also check to see if the full stop is inside or outside the last quote mark.

### **62. Turn sentence fragments into full sentences.**

Newscasters often speak in fragments: "Car crash today in Brisbane" or "Five key tips for healthy living." This headline style saves time and space, but it's not effective unless you are writing a headline. This isn't to say you can't ever use fragments, but many beginning writers don't even realise they are using them. They can be useful in persuasive writing, but be sure you are using them deliberately for effect.

It's important to recognize that all sentences need a subject (doing the action) and a verb.

"Running down the road" is not a sentence because there is no subject doing the running. Check your writing and change those fragments to full sentences where necessary.

### **63. Add cohesion words between sentences and paragraphs.**

Sentences and paragraphs can be islands. You need "bridges" linking those islands. You can increase the readability of your writing by adding in linking words between the sentences. Use the list in this booklet to find connectives and transition phrases.

### **64. Vary word choice if you're getting stuck in a rut.**

All writers get stuck in a word choice rut once in awhile. It may seem like you're using the same ten words over and over again. If you find yourself in this situation, you can do a couple of things. First, grab a thesaurus and start learning about similar words to your common set. Then use them as often as you can.

Also, it may help to try brain games to improve academic proofreading. Lumosity.com has a particularly good brain game called Word Bubbles. The game asks the player, under the pressure of a 60-second countdown clock, to form as many words as possible from just one or two letters. This forces you to explore the recesses of your mind to find those interesting words that lurk there, just waiting to be released.

### **65. Re-order sentences.**

If a paragraph seems unfocused, a simple solution could be just re-ordering the sentences. That can put ideas into a better flow. You may find that the topic sentence of the paragraph is actually hidden in the middle or at the end.

### **66. Look out for double words.**

Double words crop up occasionally in rough drafts: the the, on on, to to. It seems to be a problem of fast fingers and a racing brain. Microsoft Word will look out for this problem of double words, if you run the grammar checker. If not, you can search for possible combinations with the "find" feature in your word processor.

## Formatting

*Take some time away from the words and sentences to consider the appearance of your text.*

### **67. Look for formatting inconsistencies.**

Are all your paragraphs flush left or are some indented? Do you put the body text flush to the heading, or do you insert a line space between the two? In focusing so much on the words, we sometimes forget to make the formatting consistent throughout the whole document.

## Don't Forget!

*Once everything is in place, it's time to attend to some final concerns. Writers often forget to do these tasks in the haste to finish.*

### **68. Run Spell Check at the end.**

Spell check is a feature in every word processor, but many people don't bother to use it. Yes, spell check sometimes says a word is misspelled when it isn't. But at the very least, you should run a final spell check and assess the words flagged as incorrect. This can be time-consuming on a long document – and that's probably why many people don't bother with it – but it can find those final few errors you missed. (Check for the spelling of homophones as per No. 45.)

### **69. Proofread the tables.**

When you're so focused on the body paragraphs, you can forget about tables. Take a close look at table headings, descriptions, and sources. Errors also often lurk in that fine print below the table.

### **70. Fact-check your work.**

Sometimes we focus so much on editing and proofreading that we overlook fact-checking. Reputable magazines have a person dedicated just to checking facts in writers' articles. Go back to your document and locate dates, names, statistics, and so on, and compare them to the original source. It's also important to make sure you didn't take the fact out of context.

### **71. Re-check your quotations with the original source.**

In the process of typing in other people's words, it's easy to make a mistake. Go back to the original source and check your copy word by word. You don't want to misrepresent them.

### **72. Ensure the writing is inclusive.**

At one point in human history (well, before the 1950s), writers could get away with referring to all of humanity with the pronoun "he" or the nouns "man" or "mankind". Over time, people started to realise that this excluded women and "they" became popular to refer to a mixed-gender group.

### **73. Ensure you've avoided copying.**

If you're referring to other people's work, particularly other people's blog posts, news articles, and academic papers, make sure you don't copy even a phrase unless you are quoting directly. Taking even a phrase of 4 or 5 words from another writer can lead to charges of plagiarism. Many students fall into this trap because they can't think of another way of writing an idea. Always put other people's ideas into your own words. It's harder, but it keeps your reputation safe.

#### 74. Re-check your references

At the back of academic documents lurk the references. Perhaps the location is what causes everyone to forget to proofread them. Make sure the names and titles and dates are correct. Also look out for formatting and capitalization consistency (check your style guide).

#### 75. Proofread headings

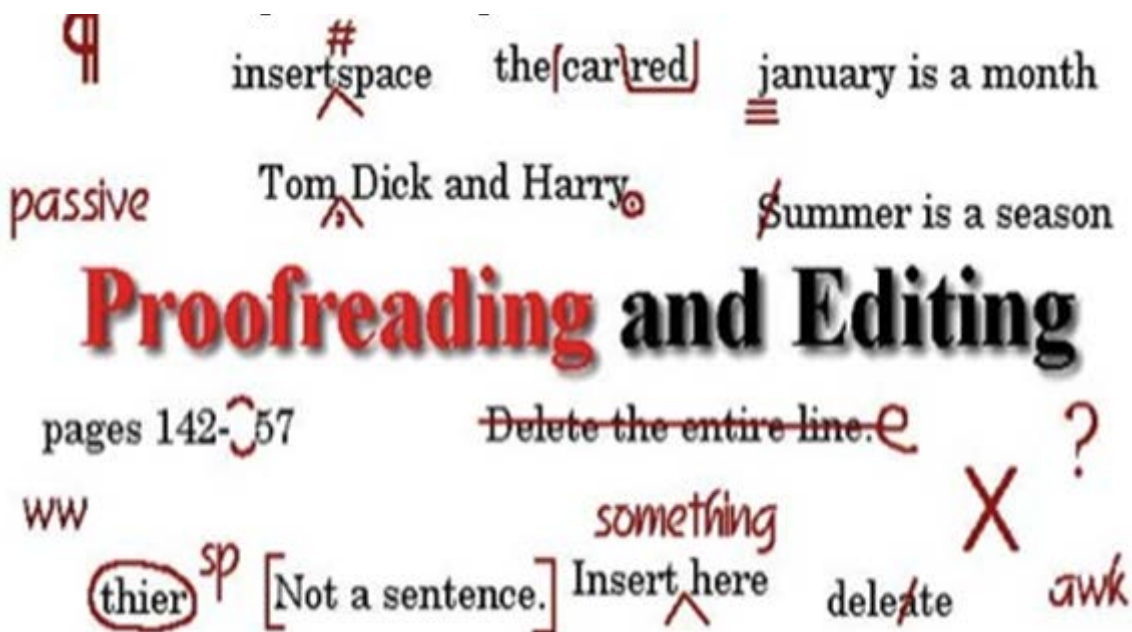
While you're so busy proofreading the body text of your document, it can be easy to forget the headings. Take one pass through the document, looking only for the accuracy of headings and subheadings. Since headings naturally stand out to the reader, errors in them stand out even more.

#### 76. Re-check any numbers.

If you have any maths in your documents, double-check it. Glaring mathematical errors can undermine your arguments and your credibility.

Adapted from:

Koerber, D. (2017). 100 Editing and Proofreading Tips for Writers - The Expert Editor. Retrieved from <https://experteditor.com.au/blog/100-editing-and-proofreading-tips-for-writers/>



## TONE

POSITIVE TONE WORDS		NEUTRAL TONE WORDS	NEGATIVE TONE WORDS	
admiring	hilarious	ambiguous	abhorrent	foreboding
adoring	hopeful	ambivalent	acerbic	frantic
affectionate	humorous	casual	angry	frightened
appreciative	interested	commanding	annoyed	furious
approving	jovial	detached	antagonistic	gloomy
bemused	joyful	direct	antipathetic	grave
benevolent	laudatory	impartial	anxious	greedy
blithe	light	informative	apathetic	grim
calm	light-hearted	introspective	apprehensive	harsh
celebratory	lively	meditative	belligerent	haughty
cheerful	mirthful	objective	bewildered	holier-than-thou
comforting	modest	questioning	biting	hopeless
comic	nostalgic	scholarly	bitter	hypercritical
compassionate	optimistic	speculative	blunt	incensed
complimentary	passionate	straightforward	bossy	indignant
conciliatory	placid, playful	unambiguous	cold	jaded
confident	poignant	understated	conceited	judgemental
contented	proud		condescending	mocking
delightful	reassuring		contemptuous	narcissistic
earnest	reflective		curt	nasty
ebullient	relaxed		cynical	obsequious
ecstatic	respectful		demanding	pretentious
effusive	reverent		depressed	resigned
elated	romantic		derisive	sarcastic
empathetic	sanguine		derogatory	scathing
encouraging	self-assured		desolate	scornful
euphoric	sentimental		despairing	sulking
excited	serene		diabolic	uneasy
exhilarated	sprightly		disappointed	vindictive
expectant	sympathetic		disrespectful	world-weary
fervent	tender		doubtful	wretched
flippant	tranquil		embarrassed	
forthright	whimsical		enraged	
friendly	wistful		evasive	
funny	worshipful		facetious	
gleeful	zealous		fearful	
happy				

## MOOD

POSITIVE TONE WORDS		NEGATIVE TONE WORDS	
amused	jubilant	aggravated	insidious
awed	liberating	annoyed	intimidated
bouncy	light-hearted	anxious	irate
calm	loving	apathetic	irritated
cheerful	mellow	apprehensive	jealous
chipper	nostalgic	barren	lethargic
confident	optimistic	brooding	lonely
contemplative	passionate	cold	melancholic
content	peaceful	confining	merciless
determined	playful	confused	moody
dignified	pleased	cranky	morose
dreamy	refreshed	crushed	nauseated
ecstatic	rejuvenated	cynical	nervous
empowered	relaxed	depressed	nightmarish
energetic	relieved	desolate	numb
enlightened	satiated	disappointed	overwhelmed
enthralled	satisfied	discontented	painful
excited	sentimental	distressed	pensive
exhilarated	silly	drained	pessimistic
flirty	surprised	dreary	predatory
giddy	sympathetic	embarrassed	rejected
grateful	thankful	enraged	restless
harmonious	thoughtful	envious	scared
hopeful	touched	exhausted	serious
hyper	trustful	fatalistic	sick
idyllic	vivacious	foreboding	sombre
joyous	warm	frustrated	stressed
giddy	welcoming	futile	suspenseful
grateful		gloomy	tense
harmonious		grumpy	terrifying
hopeful		haunting	threatening
hyper		heartbroken	uncomfortable
idyllic		hopeless	vengeful
joyous		hostile	violent
		indifferent	worried
		infuriated	