

Self-Editing Checklist

Self-editing takes time to learn and discipline to exercise. If you plan to submit your writing to any editor, a clean professional manuscript is a must. Learn better writing by checking your draft for some of these common mistakes:

Adverbs

You seldom need words ending in *ly*. A stronger verb in its place conveys more exact description. Adverbs alongside a strong verb is a double redundancy (*she tugged sharply, he hesitated briefly*). Set your search function (Find) for all words ending in *ly* and then replace with a stronger verb.

Clichés

Almost as soon as they arise, certain phrases get overused. Clichés are the hallmark of unoriginal thinking. Sometimes they're ok in dialogue, but only if the character is an unoriginal thinker. Avoid describing a character by looking in a mirror or waking up to find it was all a dream.

Contractions/plurals/possessives

Be sure you know which *its* is *it's*. *Its* is a possessive like *his*, *hers* or *theirs*. No apostrophe. *It* becomes *it's* as a contraction.

Contractions

Use them. Writers who rarely use contractions sound formal and stiff.

Plurals are easy—they never need apostrophes. (*Seven dogs are in the yard and my dog's asleep in the house.*)

Repetitions

Watch out for words repeated too closely in your text. A word or phrase in close proximity with another irritates a reader. EX: She entered the room and went through the door to the room.

Passive Voice

Action is not attributed directly to a subject. Use stronger verbs and avoid overuse of the “to be” verbs. Look for “ings” in the constructions. Avoid beginning sentences with “ing” words (gerunds). EX: Leaving the scene of the accident, I wondered if I was going to be in trouble. Taking time to note the color of her dress, he planned to buy her an orchid corsage.

Know Thy Conjugations

Lie (as in repose): lay, lain, lying (down).

Lay (as an egg) laid, laid, laying.

Redundancies The man put his hat on *his head*. Where else would he put it? He nodded *his head*. How else can one nod?

Prepositional Lead-ins

Watch out for sentences that begin with *with*, *as*, *while*, or *ings* and sentences with multiple clauses. *As he entered the room, he spun around twice, pulled out his gun, aimed it and fired.* CORRECT: As a long time firefighter, he understood the risks of entering a smoke-filled room.

Danglers

A participial phrase must refer to the subject. Wrong: *Being in a dilapidated condition, I was able to buy the house very cheap.* Correct: The house was dilapidated and I was able to buy it very cheap.

Don't Rely on Spell Check Homophones can embarrass you: to, too and two; waist and waste; break, brake; very, vary; there, their and they're; your, you're; blue, blew, bleu.

Avoid Misusing Words

Less should not be misused for **fewer**. Less refers to quantity, fewer to number.

Over should not be substituted for "**fewer than**" for the same reason.

Hopefully is often misused to mean "I hope."

Nauseous/nauseated Nauseous means "sickening to contemplate," whereas *nauseated* means sick to the stomach.

Effect/affect As a noun, effect means "to bring about." As a verb, effect means "to accomplish." Affect means "to influence."

All right Mistakenly written as **alright**, the correct form is two words.

Avoid beginning sentences with **There are** or **It is**. Many times a stronger simple noun-verb sentence is far more specific. Never write: **There's** plenty to choose from.

Use caution with **time markers, exclamation points** and **stage directions**.

Time: Suddenly and then are often unnecessary if you write short active sentences that show the rapid change. Suddenly, he heard a noise.

Exclamation points: Do not attempt to emphasize a statement by using the !Reserve for true exclamations or commands. EX: Stop!

Stage Directions: EX: He reached to pick up the letter. *He picked up the letter.* She turned to see him rifling through her purse. *He was rifling through her purse.* She unlocked her car, stepped in and sat down. She put the key in the ignition, turned it, and checked her rearview mirror. *She drove to the store.*

**Likewise, in the mornings we all hear an alarm and smell coffee, put on our robes and slippers and pour a mug to help us wake up. We take showers and dress. Avoid these types of scenes unless there is poison in the coffee or a stranger stalking outside the shower.

Be careful with Intensifiers, Diminishers and Vague wording.

Intensifiers: Large, many, a lot, very.

Diminishers: Small, tiny, little, some.

Vague: Thing, stuff, problem, situation.

Obtain a copy of Strunk & White's *Elements of Style* and refer to it often.

Read aloud and revise many times for clarity, purpose and readability.