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The University Center for Writing-based Learning

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Creating an Editing Game Plan

Tyler Noe & Nat Garcia

Overall Goals

- To look at different approaches to editing
- To learn what approaches might work best for you
- To leave the workshop with an editing game plan that you can use for your next writing project

Some Questions for You

When you have finished a writing project, long or short, do you begin editing with a plan in place?

What are some of your strategies?

Also, what sort of things do you write? Tell us about them!

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How might we approach editing?

From the University of Surrey's Writing Skills website:

"It may be tempting to work paragraph by paragraph, trying to perfect each one before attending to the next. This is, however, neither an efficient nor an effective method for editing a large document. Several of the processes, e.g.: maintaining a logical thread throughout; and identifying duplication; require more of an overview to be taken, involving review at a chapter or thesis level, rather than at a sentence or paragraph level."

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How might we approach editing?

What the quote on the previous slide tells us is that instead of moving paragraph by paragraph, it might be more productive to approach individual elements in the text.

Let's talk a bit about how that might appear—and what some of these elements in the text might be.

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Are all elements of the draft equal?

First, let's break this down into two parts.

For example,

- Global Elements might be structural or organizational—think of how paragraphs are fitting together
- Local Elements are generally sentence-level concerns like grammar and punctuation.

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GLOBAL VERSUS LOCAL: Which comes first?

Every draft is different, and deciding what is most important to focus on first will vary.

And while there might be sentence-level elements that you'll want to address, taking a look at the big picture first is a good way to begin.

That way, we can know what needs to be looked at first—and get a plan in place for other elements as well.

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Looking at the big picture

What are global elements of a paper? Think about what affects the work as a whole—and also what the work is setting out to do. Here are a few elements to think about:

- Purpose
- Organization
- Structure

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Purpose

If a text isn't meeting its purpose, then looking at punctuation won't really matter. Ask yourself what the academic purpose of the work is and read it as a reader might, looking for this idea to remain consistent throughout.

While it's fine to make small edits along the way, reading a draft through with purpose in mind can save a lot of time in the end, especially if the purpose could be made more clear.

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Organization and Structure

- Moving on from the text's purpose, organization and structure is a good place to go next, keeping in mind that every text is different.

- When we talk about organization and structure, we're often talking about paragraphs—how they are fitting together and how the organize the information that you're working with.

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Organization and Structure

Organization and Structure go hand in hand. Often we think they are interchangeable when it really means that organization is the global element to coherence and structure is the local element to concision.

Elements that affect both Organization & Structure:

- Transitions

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Proofreading v. Editing

Proofreading- is often about the local elements in your paper.

Editing- is often about the global elements in your paper.

- Often consists of revision

Proofreading

Proofreading advice:

- Focus on one type of error at a time
- Don't rely on spell check
- Take your time
- Read on the sentence level
- Circle punctuation
- Read from end to beginning
- Develop a strategy

Source: UNC Writing Center

Editing

Editing has different elements:

- Content
- Overall Structure
- Structure within paragraphs
- Clarity
- Style
- Citations
- Proofreading

Source: UNC Writing Center

Editing for Consistency

Consistency is one of the things that a reader will notice most often, sometimes without being aware of it. If a writer is sometimes capitalizing a word and sometimes not, it might be more distracting for a reader than if they made the wrong choice consistently!

Strategies for Consistency

Consistency is often a tough thing to strategize for but here are some we have found are truly helpful:

- Highlighting
- Search & Replace
- Keyword List
- Word Usage Checks

Editing for Length

Whether you need to add material or cut material, editing with this idea in mind is going to be helpful. This something else that seems to have a foot in both global and local elements. Global because you might be adding (or removing) content that will affect the overall organization and what is happening with how purpose is seen on the page. Local because this can be done in small increments as well: expanding a point word by work to tell the reader more. Taking away a few words here and there

Strategies for Length

When it comes to content length there are some best practices to solve for either being over or under your desired word count:

- you might consider taking your paper section by section and making sure everything is substantially explained (for under)
- you might consider looking at your paper on the paragraph level and find sentences that can be condensed (for over)
- Also, try Hemingway editor for things that can be simplified

Editing for Organization & Structure

Organization is often difficult to discern from structural elements of a paper. However, organization differs from structure because organization involves the whole paper while structure often deals with the in paragraph elements. Organization is focused on the more global elements while structure focuses on more local elements.

Strategies for Organization & Structure

For Organization: You might consider blocking your paper or using a reverse outline.

For Structure: You might consider looking at the paragraphs and making sure each sentence is doing what ought to be doing within the paragraph. You might also read your paper aloud for catching small oversights.

Activity

Follow these steps:

- Look at your hand out. Think about your strengths and weaknesses as a writer.
- Once you have thought of 3 strengths and 3 weaknesses identify whether they are global or local elements.
- Consider strategies you might use to work through those.

Final Thoughts

Is editing time consuming? Unfortunately, yes, it often is. But is it worth it? Again, yes!

It is very much worth it and will lead to not only a more polished draft that gets your words more effectively out into the world—spending time editing should also give you agency, confidence and empowerment as a writer.

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QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

Thank you for your time and attention!