
Section Objectives:

- Students will understand the difference between revision and editing.
- Students will be able to identify and apply the conventions of standard written English.
- Students will be able to understand formatting and recognize the difference between MLA and APA formatting.



The last stage of the writing process is editing.

The final phase in the process of writing is editing. **Editing** involves checking for errors in grammar, mechanics, and spelling, as well as making sure the formatting is appropriate and consistent. Editing is not the same process as **revising**. Revision is a more complex process and involves changing the ideas and structure of a composition. Editing, on the other hand, does not change the content or structure of a composition.

When editing a composition, check the writing against the conventions of standard written English. These are rules and guidelines for formal writing. Some of these are established formally by teachers, professors, and writers. They are often listed in writing manuals such as *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, *Garner's Modern American Usage*, by Bryan Garner, and *On Writing Well*, by William Zinnser. Other conventions are established by tradition and popular usage. A few of the most common are listed below.

Contractions

Contractions are the shortening of words or phrases such as *can't* for *cannot* or *she'll* for *she will*. These should be avoided in formal writing. Similarly, avoid shortened forms of common words. For example, *TV* should be written as *television* and *ad* should be written as *advertisement*. When using an acronym, write the acronym out the first time it appears and then put the acronym in parentheses after it. The acronym by itself can then be used in the rest of the paper:

Lisa will complete an internship for the National Organization of Women (NOW).

Spelling

Always use the spell-check feature of the word-processing program used to write the paper. However, all writing should also be checked by reading it over. Spell-check programs often miss commonly confused words like *loose* (not firmly attached or fixed in place) and *lose* (to misplace or have something taken away).

Commonly Confused Words

they're/their/there: The first is a contraction of *they are* and should not be used in a formal composition; the second is the possessive form of *they*; and the third indicates location.

hear/here: The first means to perceive sounds; the second indicates location.

your/you're: The first is the possessive form of *you*; the second is a contraction of *you are* and should not be used in a formal composition.

whose/who's: The first indicates possession; the second is a contraction of *who is* and should not be used in a formal composition.

its/it's: The first indicates possession; the second is a contraction of *it is* and should not be used in a formal composition.

accept/except: Accept means to take something offered or to come to terms with something; except means everything but. ...

affect/effect: Affect means to influence somebody or something; effect means result.

to/two/too: The first indicates direction or position; the second means the number 2; and the third means in addition or as well.

write/right/rite: The first means to put words, letters, or numbers on a surface by using a pen or pencil; the second can mean correct, morally good, or can indicate a direction or position; the last means a ceremonial act.

whether/weather: Whether means to introduce alternatives; weather is the state of the atmosphere in terms of temperature, cloudiness, etc.

Comma Splice

Another common error to look for when editing a paper is a **comma splice**. A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses are incorrectly joined with just a comma:

Tomorrow we are going to an amusement park, next week we will see a movie.

Two independent clauses must be joined by a **coordinating conjunction** or a semicolon:

Tomorrow we are going to an amusement park, and next week we will see a movie.

Tomorrow we are going to an amusement park; next week we will see a movie.

The coordinating conjunctions are *and, but, or, yet, for, nor, and so*.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

Another thing to look for when editing a paper is **pronoun-antecedent agreement**. This means when using a pronoun (a word used to stand for a noun such as *he, she, it, we, they, us*, and so on), check to make sure that it agrees with the **antecedent** (the word for which the pronoun stands) in both gender and number.

Look at the following example:

After finishing the book, I gave it to my sister.

In the example above, the pronoun *it* stands for the antecedent *book*.

Pronouns can themselves be antecedents and they must follow the same rules. **Indefinite pronouns**, that is, pronouns that do not refer to any specific antecedent can be either singular or plural.

Singular Indefinite Pronouns

each	nothing	something
either	anyone	everyone
neither	anybody	everybody
one	anything	everything
no one	someone	
nobody	somebody	

Plural Indefinite Pronouns

several	few
both	many

Singular indefinite pronouns, when used as antecedents, require singular pronouns:

Everybody must turn in his or her book report by the end of the week.

Plural indefinite pronouns, when used as antecedents, require plural pronouns:

Both took their books on the plane.

Indefinite pronouns that are modified by a prepositional phrase take a singular pronoun if the object of the preposition is uncountable:

Some of the juice spilled out of its container.

Indefinite pronouns that are modified by a prepositional phrase take a plural pronoun if the object of the preposition is countable:

Some of the people lost their luggage.

Compound subjects joined by *and* require a plural pronoun:

Danielle and Hillary have their interviews at the same time.

When compound subjects are joined by *or* or *nor*, the pronoun agrees with the closest antecedent:

Neither the employees nor the manager finished his or her work.

Neither the manager nor the employees finished their work.

Collective nouns, which are nouns that refer to a group, take a plural pronoun if referring to the members of the group individually:

The team left their instruments on the bus.

Collective nouns take a singular pronoun if referring to the group as a unit:

The team won its first game.

The titles of single entities -- books, organizations, countries -- take a singular pronoun:

France is known for its cuisine and fashion.

Certain nouns that have plural forms such as *news*, *mumps*, *economics* are treated as singular:

Most people do not get measles nowadays, as there is a vaccine for it.

The word *every* and the phrase *many a* are treated as singular:

Every dog and cat should have its vaccinations regularly.

Many a musician dreams of his or her own band.

The phrase *the number of* is treated as singular, but the phrase *a number of* is plural:

A number of people lost their luggage.

The number of people that lose his or her luggage is remarkable.

Run-on Sentences

When editing a paper, look for long sentences that may be run-on sentences. Run-on sentences are usually missing conjunctions, punctuation, or need to be broken into two or more sentences.

After reading the last Harry Potter book I could not wait to see the movie I just wanted it to remain true to the book.

The sentence above is a run-on sentence and can be fixed by adding punctuation or breaking it in to two sentences:

After reading the last Harry Potter book, I could not wait to see the movie; I just wanted it to remain true to the book.

After reading the last Harry Potter book, I could not wait to see the movie. I just wanted it to remain true to the book.

Sentence Fragments

The opposite of run-ons, sentence fragments are incomplete. Be sure all sentences have a subject and a verb and that none of them are **dependent clauses**. Dependent clauses are clauses that depend on another part of the sentence to make sense:

Max loved skateboarding. Although he preferred surfing.

In the above example, the second sentence is a sentence fragment because it depends on the previous sentence to make sense. Most of the time, a sentence fragment can be fixed by combining it with the sentence that precedes or follows it:

Max loved skateboarding, although he preferred surfing.

Formatting

The last part of the process is **formatting**. Formatting covers how a formal composition should look and includes things like font type and size, margin size, headings, and proper citations of secondary sources. Most often, the instructor will assign a specific type of formatting. The main formatting styles are published by the Modern Language Association (MLA), the American Psychological Association (APA), and the University of Chicago Press, which publishes the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Each of these styles varies. For example, MLA style requires a heading on the first page that includes the student's name, the instructor's name, the name of the class, and the date, whereas APA style requires a title page instead of a heading. They also vary in terms of how to cite a secondary source both within the text of the paper when quoting or paraphrasing as well as at the end of the paper on a works cited or bibliography page. The important thing to remember when formatting a paper is to follow the method assigned and to remain consistent.

Practice A

Read the following sentences and identify the kind of error in the sentence that needs to be corrected.

1. A person should see their doctor at least once a year.

2. After you complete your paper, you should run spell-check print out your paper and check it by reading it over.

3. James is afraid the airline will loose his luggage.

4. The jury members put its votes on slips of paper.

5. After school, Julian finished his homework. With the exception of his science project.

6. School uniforms didn't become popular with school districts until the 1970s.

7. The graph below shows the affects of playing music to help plant growth.

8. Samara wants to go to the movies, she also wants to go to a restaurant.

9. Tony finished making bracelets for his sisters cleaned his room and went to the store.

10. It is important to revise your paper, you should also leave time for editing.
