How to edit copy like a pro

The ultimate guide to editing your copy for print or online

The purpose of editing is to condense, correct and ensure your copy meets its intended purpose.

Most graphic designers prefer copy to be complete, or well advanced, before starting on a design project.

Editing is usually undertaken before proofreading. But how do you polish your copy ready for the next stage?

INITIAL REVIEW

→ **Read aloud:** read through the entire document aloud all the way through (or a chapter if the document is long). Highlight sections that don't flow well, unclear information, or areas that don't contribute to the overall story.

→ **Initial edit:** After the initial read, rework the highlighted sections and slash any unnecessary copy. Keep the deleted copy in a separate document in case it is needed later.

→ **Anticipate questions:** consider questions readers may have and add answers to the copy as you edit.

STRUCTURE

→ **Introduction:** is it strong and compelling?

→ **Information:** does it flow logically through the document?

→ **Delete:** unnecessary words or sentences.

→ **Balance:** is there a good balance of text and headings or sub-headings?

→ **Break up text:** are there sections that could be converted to bullet points, numbered lists or breakout quotes?

→ **Sentence length:** split long sentences into two sentences where possible.

→ **Shorter paragraphs:** unless the document is academic, keep paragraphs short.

→ **Invite action:** are there calls to action to encourage engagement?

VOICE

→ **Consistency:** use a consistent voice. First person (we, our), second person (you) or third person (its, they, them, theirs, he/she) can be used for business communications.

→ **Brand style:** does the copy reflect the brand style? If your brand is upbeat, look for formal language and make it more conversational. If you're working on a company profile or brochure, watch out for slang.

→ **Consider the audience:** is the copy suitable for your intended audience?

→ **Active/passive voice:** use active rather than passive voice (**active voice:** the dog bit the man / **passive voice:** the man was bitten by the dog).

GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION

→ Use a grammar checker such as Grammarly.

→ Check for unnecessary commas.

→ Watch for excessive use of exclamation marks.

SPELLING

→ Does your brand use British or American English? Check for consistency with words such as travelled/flavour (British English) and traveled/flavor (American English). British English is more commonly used in Australia.

→ Ensure spelling of unusual or industry-specific terms is correct and consistent.

→ Look for words that are often mixed up such as complement and compliment.

→ Keep an eye out for commonly misspelled words.

GENERAL COPY TIPS

→ **Delete non-essential words:** Common examples to be aware of include added up, ask the question, attached together, careful scrutiny, former graduate, introduced a new and new beginning.

→ **Repetition:** replace overused words with synonyms.

→ **Avoid clichés:** while ignorance may be bliss, it is best to avoid clichés unless they're integral to the copy.

→ **Avoid jargon:** watch for technical or industry-specific jargon that your audience may not understand. Define difficult terms.

→ **Check facts:** this is particularly important when using figures, making claims or quoting someone else.

→ **Keep it positive:** focus on solutions, not problems.