

# EDITING CHECKLIST

## PLAIN LANGUAGE ACTION AND INFORMATION NETWORK

There are several steps to the editing process and several levels of editing. Revision is an important part in your writing process. The golden rule is to not leave it to someone else to fix your document for you.

### Revising

Revising your document is your job. Of course, other people may see it as their job, too, but the goal is to give it to your colleague or supervisor in the best condition possible. Challenge yourself. Note that this stage is about content. Follow these steps during the revision stage:

#### 1. Build in time to revise:

- Plan time to let time pass — at least 24 hours if not longer — before revisions
- Read your writing more than once, letting time pass between readings
- Stand up and read the document out loud, which will help you find parts that do not make any sense. When you struggle through a sentence, it often means it is not flowing correctly. If it does not make sense to you, it won't make sense to your readers.

#### 2. Step away from your document and read it as if you did not write it. Concentrate on objectives rather than punctuation, grammar, and spelling:

- Are you saying what your readers need to know?
- Read the draft and ask how the reader will react. Is that the reaction you want?
- Have you left questions unanswered?
- Are your objectives clear?
- Does the information help the reader? If not, eliminate it.
- What is missing?

#### 3. Consider your organization's messaging:

- Did you make promises your organization cannot keep?
- Did you adhere to organization policies?
- Did you write something that will create conflict?
- Did you ethically represent the organization?
- Did you use the right tone?

## Editing/Self-editing

At this point, you should have answered all the above questions and fixed major content problems. Now you get to look at every word, sentence, and paragraph. Whether you are the author, supervisor or team member, this list is for you. Review for the following:

### 1. Readability

- Short paragraphs
- Clear, direct and concise sentences
- Effective use of repetition
- Parallel structure
- Subjects and verbs close together
- Subject usually at the front of the sentence
- A balance of sentence types and structures — the flow or rhythm feels natural and smooth
- No unnecessary words
- Plain language instead of jargon or discipline-specific words
- Good use of headings and subheadings to break up dense prose

### 2. Style

- Consistent style throughout (Chicago, AP, APA, GPO)
- Headers and lists with parallel construction
- Headings that follow hierarchy guidelines
- Consistent voice and tone

### 3. Transitions

- Logical relationships between paragraphs
- Writing that is easy to follow
- Clear transitions between parts, chapters, and sections
- Correct cross references that are also necessary and sufficient
- Informative titles, headings, and subheads

### 4. Accuracy

- Factually accurate – and the facts have a solid origin and can be proven if needed. Hint: highlight facts within the document and check them off as you *verify* them
- Names of people, organizations, offices, etc., spelled correctly and correctly stated. For example: not the Department of Treasury, but the U.S. Department of the Treasury. Look it up to be sure!
- Accurate titles
- Internal consistency – numbers and wording are the same throughout the document
- No room for misunderstanding. Hint: If possible, have someone unfamiliar with the subject read the document

## **Proofreading:**

This phase gets to the minute details, from numbers, to spelling, to verb agreements, etc. At this point, revision and editing should have taken care of 95 percent of the issues. Review for the following:

### **1. Grammar:**

- Complete sentences
- Agreement between subjects and verbs, and pronouns and antecedents
- Consistent and correct verb tense
- Correct and appropriate modifiers

### **2. Punctuation, Capitalization, and Spelling:**

- Punctuation that follows editorial guidelines
- Consistent capitalization that follows editorial guidelines
- Consistent and correct spelling that follows editorial guidelines

### **3. Mechanics:**

- Typeface conventions
- Product names and trademarks correct and consistent
- Abbreviations and acronyms only when essential
- Definitions for abbreviations and acronyms on first reference
- Editorial guidelines for numbers and symbols
- Lists and steps are numbered appropriately and correctly
- Figures and tables are explained and referred to in the preceding text
- Running footers and page numbers are correct

### **4. Formatting and Layout:**

- Departmental publications standards
- Standard templates and formats
- Effective page breaks and line breaks
- The same font throughout the document
- 508-compliant features, including colors, graphics, and photos

### **5. Graphics:**

- Consistent graphics throughout document
- Easy to understand and attractive charts, figures, and illustrations
- Figure call-outs or descriptions are capitalized correctly and in the correct typeface

### **6. Photos:**

- Properly captioned
- Fits the subject of document
- Contains appropriate metadata for 508 compliance
- Effective use of cropping