

7 TIPS FOR EDITING YOUR OWN WORK

EVERY WRITER KNOWS that putting words on the page is just one step in the process. Before you write even the first word, you develop a content strategy, conduct research, maybe interview people and create an outline.

After you've written your first draft, you're faced with the laborious task of editing. Some people think editing means catching a few typos, but true editing goes deeper — making sentences tighter, words clearer and copy more effective. A good content editor will ask bigger-picture questions. Does this website speak to our target audience? Does this brochure align with our marketing objectives?

The problem is that many of us edit our own work. My advice for editing your own work is simple: Don't do it.

Sometimes, though, budgets and timelines make it tough to hire even occasional freelance help. If you're your own eagle eye, keep this guide nearby, and follow these steps each time you edit a brochure, article, blog, presentation or other copy.



NO. 1 Step Away

If you can't hire a fresh set of eyes, at least make sure yours are as fresh as possible. If you have time, step away from your draft for 24 hours — or at least overnight. No time to spare? Take an hour to grab lunch or coffee, think about something unrelated to your project and rest your eyes.



NO. 2 Remember Your Purpose

On a piece of paper, write down the answers to the following questions:

- Who is my audience?
- Why is my company producing this piece? What is our goal?
- What are the intended key messages?

As you're reading through your copy, keep these answers in mind to ensure you're hitting your strategic marks.



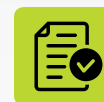
NO. 3 Print It Out

Paperless is great. But guess what? Reading on a printed page can help you catch errors you've missed on a computer screen. So, as you're preparing for a final read, send it to the printer.



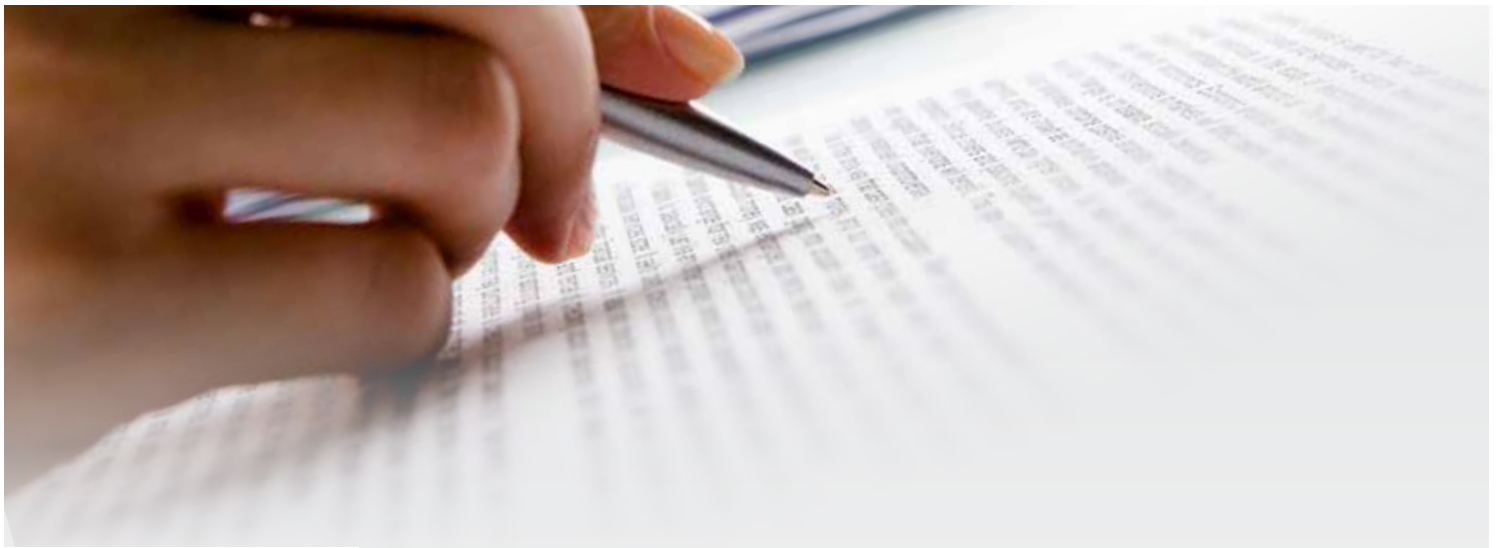
NO. 4 Think Like Your Audience

Envision your audience. If your target audience is recent retirees, put that lens on as you read. Consider the demographics and psychographics of your audience, and make sure your copy speaks to them.



NO. 5 Consider Medium and Layout

Your Word doc is typically not the last step — a designer will work with it for print and/or online publication. Hopefully, you've considered this in your original writing, but editing presents another opportunity to think about the layout. For example, do you need to add callouts or subheads to break up the text?



SIMPLE WAYS TO SIMPLIFY

DON'T USE

- **very unique** (*Nothing can be very unique. It either is one-of-a-kind (like really, truly one-of-a-kind) or it's not.*)
- **literally** (*See <http://www.theactivevoice.com/the-active-voice/i-think-you-meant-figuratively>*)
- **tried to** (*If you succeeded, you didn't try. You did.*)
- **the manner of, the issue of** (*Almost always unnecessary.*)
- **needless to say** (*Apparently, it needs to be said, so just say it.*)

INSTEAD OF

- **in order to**, use **to**.
- **have a tendency to**, use **tend**.



NO. 6 Look for Specific Words to Cut

When you edit your own work, it might be challenging to cut words and tighten up sentences — it's natural to think what you've written is pretty darn good just the way it is. To make it easier, you can look for some key words and phrases that editors love to cut. See sidebar (left) for specific words you can trim to simplify your writing.



NO. 7 Do Multiple Read-Throughs

It's tough to edit anything in a single pass — even for the most adept multitasker. Leave yourself time for a minimum of three reads:

1 Content Read: In your first edit, make sure you're hitting the mark strategically — achieving your marketing goals, speaking to the target audience and writing for the selected medium. (And yes, if you see obvious typos, go ahead and fix them, but don't focus on the language yet.)

2 Language Read: Can sentences be tighter and redundancies eliminated? Are there awkward sentences that need repair? Is there a better, clearer, more specific way to say something?

3 Final Read: The final read is your opportunity to fix the little things that can cause big problems: misspellings, typos, improper grammar and the like.

Ideally, each of these reads will be a day apart. But

let's face it, you're doing a hundred different things, and your successive tight deadlines aren't ideal. So between edits, at least take a walk, clear your mind, refresh your caffeinated beverage of choice and read again.

HAPPY EDITING!

In an ideal world, you'd have an editor on staff. Or at least a freelance editor on call. But we all know the world isn't ideal.

So, arm yourself with these seven tips and dig in.

