MACQUARIE University

How do I…

EDIT MY PAPER?

Editing your paper can be a daunting task and often a task that we don't budget in enough time. But sloppy editing can have severe consequences – reviewer frustration could lead to a more critical judgement of your work and its integrity, which may strongly influence whether your paper is accepted for publication. Some editing can be done while you write. For example you should be aware of the overall organisational structure of the paper you are writing from the start (does your journal require additional elements such a lay summary paragraph, how many words should be in the abstract etc), you should use a reference management software program (such as Endnote) to manage your referencing, and use spelling and grammar checkers (such as Grammarly). When drafting your paper, however, you shouldn't also be constantly editing. The consequence of constant editing makes drafting a more painful process. Aim to thoroughly edit once your draft is fully written. When you start editing aim to edit from macro to micro – that is look at the whole paper first, then focus on each section, followed by each paragraph, each sentence, and finally each word(!). If you edit from micro to macro, you might find that all that work perfecting 'paragraph X' goes to waste when you realise that that the information in 'paragraph X' isn't relevant and gets removed from your draft.

EDIT AS A WHOLE

Check your target journal's expected overall paper structure ensuring you have all the sections and that you've used the correct heading titles (background versus introduction) and check there is total consistency throughout your paper – if you've used the word healthcare, always write 'healthcare' and don't sometimes write 'health care'. To ensure consistency it is advisable to create a style guide. A style guide ensures multiple authors are also aware of the style choices you have made for the paper. Finally, some general questions to ask yourself regarding the whole paper, "Does the title match the content?", and "Does the paper answer your central research question or aim?"

EDIT EACH SECTION

Create a list of major points covered in each section and flag anything that might be better placed in another section, does anything need cutting out, or has anything been omitted?

EDIT EACH PARAGRAPH

Check your topic sentences, check that you've only made one point/paragraph, and check that the paragraphs relate to each other in a logical order. Have you made effective use of signposts

EDIT EACH SENTENCE

Check sentence length (aim for not longer than ~3 lines), and ensure sentences are easy to understand. You'll need to trim excess words from your sentences –ask yourself, "Can I write what I've written in five words using three words?". Some signals indicating wordiness are i) the use of verbose phrases like 'in the event that' (can be replaced by 'if') or 'has a requirement that' (can be replaced by 'needs'), ii) the use of adverbs (e.g. actually, basically, and definitely), iii) the use of propositions 'of', 'in', and 'by', iv) unnecessary changes of verbs to their noun form – look for words ending in 'tion' and 'ance', and v) the use of relative pronouns 'who', 'whose', 'whom', 'which', and 'that'. Your writing will still consist of these elements but by searching for them with the "Find" function in Word, it will help highlight possible sentences where you can reduce the word count.

FINAL EDIT AS A WHOLE

Check that any acronyms (and I suggest you avoid too many, but that's a different topic!) have been written in full the first time you have written them and consider whether an acronym list will be useful.

FINAL PROOF-READ

We are always pushed for time but do try to allow time between writing the draft and doing the final proof-read. Allowing time, gives you 'fresher eyes'. If possible do give your draft to fresh eyes – ask others to proof-read your draft. Most importantly don't rush!

Dr Adèle Thomas
August 2020