

Copy Editing (Self) Checklist

Spelling & Usage

- Which dictionary are you using? (For English: British, American, Australian, or Canadian)
- Look up commonly misspelled words that you may have included
- Double-check any word you feel uncertain about
- Make a list of pronouns and other words (that you may have made up) to ensure consistency

Grammar

- Does each sentence have a noun and a verb (and possibly an object)?
- Are there any sentence fragments? If so, are they used effectively?
- Are there any sentences where the meaning could be misunderstood?

Common errors:

- subject-verb agreement
- pronoun-antecedent agreement
- misplaced or dangling modifiers
- incorrect or substantial use of articles
- incorrect or substantial use of prepositions
- restrictive versus non-restrictive clauses
- use of transitional adverbs
- parallel construction
- incorrect or inconsistent verb tense

Punctuation

- Does each sentence end with punctuation?
- Have you used any colons or semi-colons? Do you know how to properly use them?
- Can you find any comma splices?
- Is all dialogue contained within the appropriate marks? (American English uses double quotation marks)
- Does dialogue span two or more paragraphs? If so, are the quotations used correctly?
- Does the dialogue end in a comma or a full stop? (what follows?)
- Is the punctuation for parenthetical statements (spaced en-dashes or closed em-dashes) consistent?

Common errors:

- the serial comma
- single or double quotation marks
- capital after a colon
- proper ellipses versus spaced periods

Hyphenation

- Are your compound adjectives hyphenated? If so, do all compound adjectives have that option (some aren't!)?
- Are geographic indicators hyphenated? (northwestern versus north-western)
- Are you using hyphens or un-spaced en-dashes between words of equal association?

Capitalization

- Is the capitalization consistent for the proper nouns on people, places, and things?

Word Choice

- How does your word choice affect the tone of your writing?
- Are you using too many dialogue tags? Too few?
- Does it match your readers' vocabulary?
- Are you made-up words consistent and logical?
- Is there regional language? If so, will people outside of that region be able to understand?
- Can you find any words that you may have misused or that may be misunderstood?
- Avoid empty words
- Check for incorrect use of 'and' and 'as well as'

Fact-checking

- What is the time period of your writing? Are there any references?
- Double-check everything you're unsure about—clothing, slang, objects, technology, etc.

Style

- Avoid padded phrases (can be replaced with one word)
- Does the level of formality match the intended purpose of your writing?
- Are some sentences structurally confusing? Rewrite or reform to simplify them
- Look closely at your use of adverbs (mostly words ending in 'ly'). How many do you have? How often do you use them?
- Avoid repetition or redundancies of words or phrases
- Use active voice where possible

See Tigerpetal Press's Services page for Editing and Design work

See the blog for more writing tips

Please note that this copy editing checklist has been simplified for author use; not all copy editing items have been included

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