

Strategies for Editing Sentences

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial focuses on editing sentences for completeness, variation, and syntax in four parts:

1. Editing Sentences
2. Editing for Completeness
3. Editing for Sentence Variation
4. Editing for Syntax

1. Editing Sentences

Effective sentences are critical to the style and clarity of an essay. Editing is the step in the writing process when the sentences, word choices, and style of a written work are reviewed and improved. Following are some strategies for editing sentences:

- Read sentences out loud.
- Ask someone to read and review your sentences.
- Read your draft backwards (this creates distance between you and your writing, and enables you to focus on your words, rather than the ideas you want to convey).

2. Editing for Completeness

When editing, it is important for writers to review their work to find and correct incomplete and run-on sentences. Although this task may seem like proofreading for grammar and mechanics, it's important to perform it while editing.



HINT

Proofreading focuses on correcting typos and similar mistakes. The purpose of editing is to improve clarity and style. This is the difference between the two even though, while editing, you sometimes correct problems in word usage, punctuation and areas addressed during other steps in the writing process.

Read the following passage from a sample essay:

I didn't like *Beloved* much I didn't get what was going with the girl Beloved. She was a ghost, but Sethe didn't know that, it seems. Odd to think about. Still, I thought the book would have been better if Toni Morrison kept it more realistic.

Now read following version, in which a couple of sentences have been edited to improve clarity, style, and mechanics.

I didn't like *Beloved* much, because I didn't understand what was going on with the girl, Beloved. She was a ghost, but it seems Sethe didn't know that. This is odd to think about, but I still thought the book would have been better if Toni Morrison had kept it more realistic.

Only a few changes have been made, but the passage flows better. Readers of the edited version don't need to struggle with the run-on sentence at the beginning of the original paragraph, or the sentence fragment towards the end of it. The impact of the argument is improved, even without substantial changes.

3. Editing for Sentence Variation

Repetitive sentences are a problem for some writers. Sentence variation — alternating long, short, simple, and complex sentences, and changing the beginnings of sentences — can help to maintain readers' interest.

Sentence variation also enables writers to express their ideas in a number of dynamic ways. When all or most sentences in a work are the same, the ideas they convey may be difficult to distinguish. When editing, review your sentences for variation, and re-position sentences that seem repetitive due to their structure or placement.

Read the following paragraph from a report on a survey of the opinions of women who live near the construction site of a new power plant.

The first thing we did was gather data from women in our class. The second thing we did was gather data from women walking around campus. The third thing we did was expand to the neighborhoods nearby. We did this by putting flyers in the doors of each house, with the questions from our survey and the email to send responses to. We did this because we wanted to get some information from women beyond the school. We didn't want to just have data from college students, but every woman who has to live within the range of the proposed power plant.

The structure of these sentences makes reading tedious. Many of them are of similar length and complexity, and most begin in the same way. Now read this edited version:

We gathered information from three groups: first, the women in our class, followed by a sample of women surveyed on campus, and finally, women living in the surrounding neighborhood. In order to reach the surrounding areas, we put flyers in the doors, along with an invitation to complete the survey online. We did this because we didn't want to only get data from college students, but from all women who live within range of the proposed power plant.

The first, second and third sentences were combined and modified, resulting in one longer and more complex sentence that conveys the information more effectively. The beginnings of a couple of the other sentences were also edited to reduce repetition (e.g., the over-use of "we" in the original paragraph). One sentence was removed because, when information was added to the last sentence, it was no longer needed.

4. Editing for Syntax

Syntax is the formation and ordering of words into sentences, as well as the study of how words form sentences. It is necessary to understand syntax in order to understand the relationship between structure and style. When editing, writers should evaluate syntax and its impact on the style, tone, and voice of their work.



TERM TO KNOW

Syntax

The formation and ordering of words into sentences, as well as the study of how words form sentences.

Though you may not have realized it, you've already edited for syntax because it's impossible to change the structure of a sentence — to make it more complete, or to vary its relationship to other sentences — without thinking about (and changing) word order. Editing for syntax also involves assessment of how a sentence's syntax contributes to the style of the entire work.



HINT

When you review your work, consider whether any sentences are out of place in terms of style, or with respect to your goals, tone, or voice. If you identify any problems, you know what to do: edit!



SUMMARY

This tutorial examined the process of editing sentences. Writers must ensure that each sentence effectively contributes to the style and clarity of their work. The processes of editing sentences for completeness (ensuring that incomplete and run-on sentences are corrected) and editing for sentence variation (alternating sentence structure to maintain readers' interest) were also described. Additionally, editing for syntax (i.e., the formation and ordering of words into sentences, as well as the study of how words form sentences) was covered. The way in which words are ordered impacts the style, tone, and voice of written work.

Source: Adapted from Sophia Instructor Gavin McCall



TERMS TO KNOW

Syntax

The formation and ordering of words into sentences as well as the study of how words are formed into sentences.

