

Why Edit?

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial examines the role of editing in the writing process, and how it impacts writers' understanding of their work and themselves. It also considers insights on the value of editing from three famous writers.

This tutorial explores the value of editing in two parts:

1. Why Edit?
2. Writers on Editing

1. Why Edit?

The **editing** step of the writing process involves the improvement of sentences, word choices, and style of a written work.



HINT

Editing is different from revision, in which the ideas, organization, and support of a written work are re-visioned and rethought. It's also different from proofreading, a process in which errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, mechanics, and formatting are identified and corrected.

Each step in the writing process should be performed separately. By doing so, writers can focus on one at a time, rather than attempt to complete one step while distracted by tasks associated with another. Although the "one-at-a-time" approach is ideal, writers sometimes perform tasks out of sequence while working on a draft. Writers who do so should continue to think of the steps separately, and perform them completely, and in order, to the greatest extent possible.

Ideas and their support are the most important aspect of essay-writing. However, the style in which ideas are communicated creates an impression — good or bad — on readers. Editing improves readability; this is the primary benefit it provides. Editing is not used to make "big picture" changes, but to improve flaws in that picture so that its overall impact is enhanced.



TERM TO KNOW

Editing

2. Writers on Editing

While discussing the value of editing, Mark Twain wrote the following:

"The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug."

Twain's sentence indicates the need for precise detail to convey images, points, and ideas. Precise detail enables writers to say exactly what they mean, and enables readers to understand exactly what was meant. When editing, writers seek to identify and clarify differences between lightning and lightning bugs.

"In writing, you must kill all your darlings".

This abrupt sentence describes the editing process done correctly. Writers must often cut material that is well-written to strengthen a draft, including writing they like best. Although a writer may spend much time and effort on his or her "darlings," they must be removed if they don't advance the purpose of the work. Although the quotation may refer to the revision step, it correctly indicates that although changes made during editing may be painful, they must be made when the work will benefit as a result.



DID YOU KNOW

This quotation is most commonly attributed to novelist William Faulkner, though other writers have also been credited (e.g., Allen Ginsberg, Eudora Welty, and Oscar Wilde).

Here is some advice about editing from Stephen King, one of the world's most prolific writers:

"Write with the door closed, rewrite with the door open."

King separates the drafting step from the revision, editing, and proofreading steps of his writing process. By starting with his doors to the world closed — physically and mentally — he can focus his attention on early drafts. When he's satisfied with a draft, he opens those doors (and himself) to feedback and criticism, and allows light to enter, to see what he wrote during his isolation.

King doesn't only give advice in this sentence; he comments on the writing process, and the perspectives from which writers consider their work.

Regarding the value of editing, writers seem to agree on one thing: writing is hard and, because it is, writers cannot reasonably expect to "get it right" the first time. In all writing, therefore, editing is one of the keys to victory.



SUMMARY

This tutorial reviewed the reasons why writers edit their work, including the improvement of sentences, word choices, and style. Good editing enables writers to say exactly what they mean, and enables readers to understand exactly what they meant. Quotations about editing from three famous

writers reflect their views on the value of editing and its impact on writing.

Source: Adapted from Sophia Instructor Gavin McCall



TERMS TO KNOW

Editing

Improving the sentences, word choices, and overall style of an essay or other piece of writing.