1.36 Proofreading and editing

Language and structural mistakes in your writing create a bad impression. They can impede understanding and result in a lower mark or even failure of an assignment. It is very important, therefore, that you check your work very carefully for:

General layout

Text organisation

Coherence

Grammar, spelling and punctuation

Referencing

Style

Overall impression

It is up to you to develop your own strategies for doing this effectively. Here are a few general tips:

- Try reading your work out loud, either to yourself or to someone else. This is particularly effective for checking punctuation, grammar and general coherence. It's usually much easier to find mistakes in someone else's writing.

- Read through fairly quickly, simply underlining or highlighting any words that don't look right or where you think there might be a grammar problem. Then when you've finished check these in a dictionary or grammar book. In this way, you'll also get an idea of the overall structure and flow.

- Make a list of the type of mistakes you make, and pay particular attention to these when you're checking your writing.

- Don't forget to use the computer spellchecker, but don't rely on it entirely. It won't recognize errors such as "Their are many arguments ..." Grammar checkers will usually indicate where there's a possible mistake, but they are not foolproof, so shouldn't be relied on.

- Check early on in your department on the preferred referencing system and on general guidelines on layout and structure.

- Get some help if you do have problems with your grammar.

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- Give yourself plenty of time to do this: you may realise that you have a lot of changes to make.

Editing checklist

General layout

- Is the title page (if applicable) clear, accurate and complete?
- Is the contents page (if applicable) clearly laid out and accurate?
- Are your lines double-spaced? (or 1.5 - check your guidelines)
- Are all pages numbered, if necessary?
- Have you avoided unnecessary use of bold, italic and colour type?
- Have you used a standard font (Arial etc.)?
- Is the font large enough?

Text organisation

- Does the introduction show understanding of the question?
- Does the introduction indicate the structure of the answer?
- Are all the sentences complete?
- Are all the paragraphs adequately developed?
- Do all the sections (if appropriate) have clear, consistent headings?
- Are tables and figures properly integrated into the text?
- Are all tables and figures titled, with source if necessary?
- Is there a clear and adequate conclusion or summary?

Coherence

- Does it all make sense? (especially to another person)
- Do sentences, paragraphs and sections run together smoothly?
- Is everything relevant?
- Is your language as concise as possible?

Grammar, spelling & punctuation

- Have you carefully checked for the type of grammar mistakes you tend to make?
- Have you used verb tenses consistently?
- Have you used the spellchecker?
- Have you checked the spelling yourself? Is your spelling consistent (eg organisation/organization)?
- Does your punctuation make your writing easier to read?
- Have you checked your use of commas?

Referencing

- Are all your sources always acknowledged?
- Is your referencing accurate and consistent?
- Is your list of references complete and in the correct format?
- Do all your references appear in your reference list?
- Are the beginning and the end of quotes clearly indicated?
- Are all the quotes integrated into your main text?

Style

- Have you avoided colloquial (casual/slang) language?
- Have you avoided personal language (I, me, my etc.) where necessary?
- Is your language as clear and as concise as possible?
- Is your vocabulary varied, but always appropriate?

Overall

- Have you answered the question/fulfilled the task?
- Is everything relevant?
- Do you understand everything you've written?
- Are you pleased with it?