

How to Edit a Paper: A Checklist to Give to Your Students

As you work through the pile of student papers on your desk, how often do you find yourself wishing that you had a good checklist to give students to help them find and fix their errors and also to encourage them to be responsible for keeping track of the mistakes they seem to keep making in paper after paper? If that's been your wish, then you'll find a useful checklist you can download at this url: wac.gmu.edu/program/newsletter.

The handout, which can be especially useful for ESL students, includes advice on how to keep an error log and details a number of strategies students can use to find their own mistakes. Here's a sampling of some of the advice you'll find on the handout:

1. Find your errors:

- a. Read your paper out loud and point to each word with a pencil as you read.
- b. Read through your paper looking for only one of the errors you know you frequently make. To help focus your attention, use a ruler or piece of paper to cover everything but one line at a time. Circle all suspected errors of that type. Then go through the same process for the next type of error. When you focus on only one type of error at a time, the editing process seems less overwhelming.
- c. Use a different color ink for each error type to help distinguish them visually.
- d. After you've corrected the errors, ask a trusted reader to look at your work and/or use a grammar checker on the computer.

2. Check for varied sentence structure and length:

With a pen in your hand, read your paper out loud. At the end of each sentence, make a slash mark (/). Look at your sentences: Are they very long? Very short? You may want to combine some very short sentence and/or break up some very long sentences.

3. Check for complete sentences:

Focus on individual sentences and look at the subjects and verbs you've already underlined to see if each of your sentences includes a subject and a verb. Pay close attention to sentences beginning with words like "because," "when," "since," and "if"; these are examples of conjunctions that can cause sentence fragments unless the clause they introduce is attached to another complete idea.

4. Buy a good ESL dictionary:

In the writing center, we use the *Longman Dictionary of American English*, which is designed specifically for non-native English speakers and provides valuable grammatical and syntactical information that dictionaries for native speakers lack.