Editing and proof-reading

Essential business writing skills to improve productivity

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Keep the reader front and centre

Darrell Croker – *Lead Coach*

The volume, velocity, and complexity of business communication means audience-centred writing is a must.

Clear, concise and outcomes-focused messages are the best weapons in the information overload war.

During 30-plus years in journalism, I turned countless words into succinct copy. Learning to edit and proofread will make you a clearer, more persuasive communicator. Use these tips to ensure your writing is rewarded.

"Let the reader find that they cannot afford to omit any line of your writing because you have omitted every word that they can spare."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Drafting +

Editing and Proofreading

= Reader-centred writing

Proficiency in editing and proofreading is the key to excellent writing. Editing ensures correct content, accuracy, and clarity. Proofreading ensures consistency, readability, and flow.

Your first draft should contain all the required information. Next, edit it to a professional standard. Use digital tools such as searches, dictionaries, and thesauruses to check facts, spelling, and word use. Run spell-check and grammar-check. Write in active voice.

Skilled proofreading can mean the difference between a reader finishing your communication or losing interest, or being frustrated. Take a helicopter view of the presentation, and then pay ruthless attention to detail. Read aloud to uncover unwieldy sentences and unnecessary words, long paragraphs, passive voice, punctuation errors, and inconsistent style.

Always edit and proofread to ensure mistake-free language and flowing structure in a persuasive format.

Create a first draft that contains all the required information

Edit your draft to a professional standard

Use digital tools

- Web searches
- Dictionaries & thesauruses
- Spell-checks
- Write in active voice

Read the draft aloud to uncover errors

- Unwieldy sentences
- Unnecessary words
- Long paragraphs
- Passive voice
- Punctuation errors
- Inconsistent style

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Editing checklist

Treat business writing as communicating outcomes-focused messages, not as completing a task. The former delivers clarity and results. The latter leads to confusion and derails productivity.

Most people overwrite. They rush their first draft, writing like they speak. The result is unnecessary words, phrases, and information. Nothing is more likely to discourage a reader than a rambling sentence or paragraph.

And most people aren't taught how to edit. They think it's running a spell-check or quickly looking for typos. Editing ensures your words and structure grab the reader's attention.

Apply these tips and you'll be more confident that your draft makes sense and hits the bull's-eye.

Aligned to purpose and audience
- [ ] Content reflects overall document purpose
- [ ] Addresses reader's needs and expectations
- [ ] Presents appealingly – use of white space

Clear and succinct
- [ ] Active headings – include a verb
- [ ] Active, not passive sentences
- [ ] No redundant words, phrases or jargon
- [ ] No repetitive words

Right tone
- [ ] Appropriate to your relationship with the reader

Accurate
- [ ] Check every fact – especially names, numbers, and amounts
- [ ] Logical content flow
- [ ] Attachments and links
- [ ] Spell-check and grammar-check with Microsoft or other apps

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Proofreading checklist

Is this familiar? You've completed your document. You've scanned it for errors. It looks great. You hit send and eagerly await a quick response. But instead of digesting your well-crafted message, the first thing your reader spots is a typo in the second paragraph.

Mistakes like typos occur because our brain tells us what we think we are saying, and our eyes are prepped to confirm what's on screen matches what's in our head.

Proofreading is a skill that needs to be honed. And don't leave it to Microsoft and other spell-check and grammar-check tools. They won't alert you to missing content and other mistakes.

Apply these tips and you'll trick your brain into thinking it's reading your draft for the first time and ensure your messages are error-free.

☐ Proofread in a different location

When you have completed the online spell-check and grammar-check as part of your editing, take your draft – in electronic form or hard copy – and proofread it in a different location. Moving location will help sharpen your eye for detail and turn off that voice in your head that says "it looks great, hit send".

☐ Read aloud

It's the best technique for spotting superfluous and repetitive words. If you rely on your eyes and your internal dialogue to proofread, then you're likely to keep unnecessary words and not spot other errors, especially punctuation. Hearing your words also helps detect:

- inappropriate tone
- poor grammar
- missing information
- clunky or fuzzy words and phrases.

☐ Ask someone else to read your document

There's nothing like another pair of eyes on your work, especially if they belong to someone who understands something about your content and what you want your document to achieve.

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The takeaway

Use this tip sheet to ensure everything you draft is easy to read, mistake-free and persuasive. Make your words stand out.

Good writers don't just find time to review their draft. They make time.

Communicate For Impact can help you and your team develop active writing skills to achieve better business results. **Contact us here** or **call 1300 887 854** for individual coaching and team workshops.

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