ACADEMIC SKILLS

Factsheet

Edit (1) – self-editing

C21
ENGLISH FOR THE 21st CENTURY
Levels 3 and 4

Basics

Self-editing is when you check your own work for mistakes. This is something you should do whenever you write. In exams, you often have little time to do this, so you will probably just quickly read over your work to check for mistakes in grammar, spelling and organization. On the other hand, when you are writing an assignment (essay, report, presentation, etc.), you have more time to try out different editing techniques.

The academic context

At college or university, you will have a lot of written work to do, and you will want to achieve the highest marks possible. Developing a procedure for editing your work will ensure you check everything you need to, such as spelling, grammar and content. It may take time to edit, but checking and assessing your work will enable you to develop into a writer whose content, structure and style earn top grades.

Key features

Things to check in a piece of writing

- Spelling
- Grammar
- Sentence construction
- Punctuation
- Paragraph construction
- Appropriateness of language
- Comprehension – does it make sense?
- Content – does it address the topic and answer the question?
- Overall organization – is there an introduction, main body and conclusion?

As mentioned above, the approach to self-editing varies a little depending on the circumstances you are writing under.

Editing in a test or exam

- Have you definitely answered the question? Pressure may make you misread a question and answer one you hoped to get, rather than the exact question that has been asked. It is also easy to get carried away when you are writing and wander off the point.
- Have you included a strong introduction and conclusion?
- Do your paragraphs have a topic sentence and supporting sentences?
- Have you avoided your 'favourite' mistakes? For example, if you know your spelling is weak, allocate a few minutes to checking it. If you tend to get your tenses wrong, check those.
- Is your writing legible? If the examiner can't understand what you have written, you could lose marks. Cross out anything illegible and write the word(s) clearly.

Editing for an assignment

- Focus on checking one possible problem area at a time. You are more likely to catch mistakes if your editing has a specific focus.
- Try reading your work from the end to the beginning, sentence by sentence. By reading the sentences in the wrong order, your mind is tricked out of skipping over words and phrases, and you are more likely to see spelling and grammar errors.
- Read your work aloud to yourself to focus on whether your punctuation is correct. You can often hear if a comma or full point is missing.
- Have a break, and give your brain a rest. Coming back to your work again later means you can read it with a fresher eye – and find mistakes you missed earlier.
- Make technology work for you. If you wrote a piece of work by hand, try typing it out on a computer. The spellchecker and grammar-checker are your friends: they are not always right, but they can help. On the other hand, if you wrote a piece of work on your computer, printing your work and reading it on paper can help you spot errors.

Challenges / difficulties

Self-editing is difficult because since you already know what *should* be on the page, you may find that your brain assumes it is there – which means it is hard to spot your errors.

How can I develop this skill?

Get into the habit of always editing your work. Even in a very short test, allow a few minutes at the end for editing. You can pick up a lot of marks by correcting basic errors. Doing this regularly will make you more self-aware, so that you gradually stop making the same mistakes. When you have more time (e.g. when you write an assignment), start writing as soon as possible, and then have a break for a day or two. (Even an hour is better than nothing.) When you reread your work, it will be easier to spot mistakes.

Learning outcome

When you learn to self-edit, you might still make mistakes, but you can avoid the worst of them. Some mistakes, especially basic ones, can create a very poor impression. If you learn to catch them before you submit your work, you are bound to get higher marks.

Theory to practice

Imagine you have written this paragraph in an exam. There is one mistake in each line. Correct the mistakes and discuss what you found with a partner. What kinds of mistake are they?

For young people, there is several disadvantages to studying online. First of all, they do not have the social life they can experiense at college or university and as a consequence, it is not so easy to make new friends. Moreover, it can be much difficult to form study groups, especially if you want face–to–face contact with others students. Finally, the pastoral support offered, at a real university, is not so readily available online.

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Ways to get more practice

You can find exercises online which give you practice in all aspects of editing. If you have any drafts of pieces of writing you did in the past, you can also use these to practise your editing skills. Look back at your writing and make a note of the kinds of mistakes you usually make. You can then give these special attention when you self-edit in future.