Directory of Editing Strategies

A range of strategies to help you edit for structure, criticality and style.

Editing for Structure

Aims

- **Signposting:** it is clear that you're answering the question/fulfilling the brief (and how)

- **Relevance:** all content relates to the question/task and furthers your argument/central aims

- **Flow:** there's a sense of logical progression from paragraph to paragraph with no abrupt changes of direction

- **For IMRAD structures:** material is in the right place (i.e. introduction, methods, results etc.)

Strategies

- Use a highlighter to identify where in your introduction and conclusion you have outlined your central aims for the reader and your concluding position

- Does your conclusion offer a coherent statement of your position that you can summarise as a sentence, as an 'elevator pitch'? ("My answer to this question is …/My solution to this problem is …/My recommendation in this case is …").

- Check that this position matches the question you were set or that you devised, and that it also matches the way you outlined this position in your introduction

- Scan your introduction: have you given the reader an indication of your structure so that have a mental map to follow as they read?

- Look at each paragraph. Which one sentence would you keep if you had to delete the rest? Ideally, this should be your topic sentence: the first sentence of the paragraph and the one that indicates the central aim of the paragraph and shows how it relates to the question.

- Does this topic sentence make a statement or observation of your own, or merely repeat factual information from elsewhere? If the former, you may wish to redraft your topic sentence or see if it's actually buried elsewhere in the paragraph

- Look at the first line of each paragraph. Could the reader follow your argument just by reading these? Does this structure match what you proposed to do in the introduction?

- Check with a quick visual scan if you have any very long or very short paragraphs. If so, do you need to split them, merge them, unpack/develop them, or cut them? Typical paragraph length will vary according to your subject. Generally, a paragraph should be more than two sentences so two sentences would be too short. And if you only have two paragraphs on a page, those paragraphs are too long.

- Have you used signposting words to indicate how each paragraph relates to the one before, or to your overall argument? Can you imagine your reader asking 'why are you telling me this? How is this related to what you've just told me? How does this answer the question?' If so, more signposting may be needed.

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For Dissertations and Research Projects

- Scan the introduction and conclusion of each individual chapter. Have you clearly signposted each chapter's purpose and how it helps you further your overall argument or aims? Each chapter has its own introduction, which fleshes out the structure for that chapter in more detail than your main introduction did.

- If you are following an IMRAD structure (the introduction/methods/results/discussion structure common in the empirical sciences), does each chapter contain the appropriate content and fulfil its designated purpose? I.e. does the results chapter report your findings and the discussion chapter evaluate them?

- Before submitting, read your whole dissertation all the way through like a reader would. Can you spot any repetitions? Any places where more signposting is needed to remind readers of your central research question? Any places where you have over-signposted, and spent too long recapping the previous chapter at the start of a new one, for example?

Editing for Criticality

Aims
- Fully developed, persuasive points that don't leave significant questions unanswered for the reader

- Claims that are fully supported and evidenced

- To make it apparent why you are engaging with the existing literature and what your own critical stance is

Strategies: The Challenge Read Technique

- For every point you make, or sentence you write, could the reader challenge you? Could they come back at you with a question like:

- Why?

- How?

- So what? (I.e. Why are you telling me this? How does it help you answer the question?)

- How do you know that? Where's your evidence?

- That's what the literature says: what do you think?

- How else might that be explained and why is your interpretation the most convincing?

Editing for Style

Aims

- To demonstrate awareness of the stylistic conventions of your discipline

- To ensure your writing is reader-friendly and not overly complicated

- To maintain a consistent tone throughout

Strategies

- Find a couple of journal articles in your discipline that you find accessible and read them for style rather than content. Use what you notice about their tone and vocabulary to compile a checklist of stylistic conventions.

- Reading your work aloud (or using software that does this for you) can defamiliarise your writing and make it easier to spot any stylistic issues. Look or listen out for:

   o Overly long, complicated sentences (anything longer than 3 lines may need to be cut)

   o Incomplete sentences that don't express a complete idea

   o Any informal or conversational-sounding phrases

   o Any phrases that could be more concise (could "in addition to this" become "additionally," for instance?)

   o Overly complicated vocabulary that you can't confidently define/use (sometimes this creeps in thanks to a thesaurus but can cause issues!)