

# Editing and Proofreading

# 9

It happens all too often. A student works hard to revise an essay—reading it over, making changes (some of them extensive), refining sentences and words—all to arrive at the best version possible. Then the student types the paper and hands it in without even a glance.

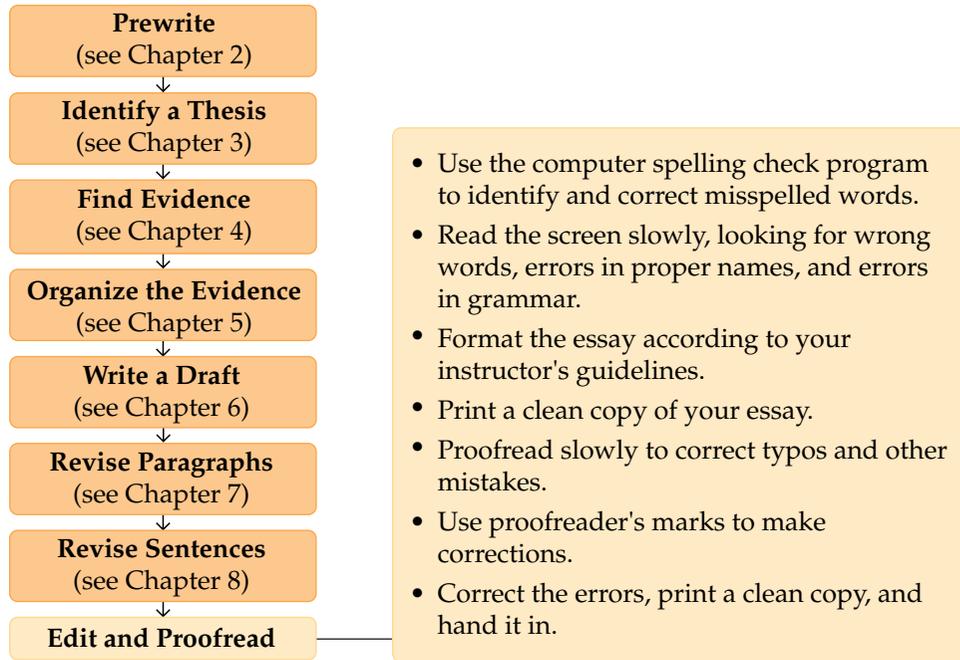
Wanting to get a piece of writing off your desk is a normal human response to so much work. But if you don't edit and proofread—that is, closely check your writing for grammar, spelling, and typographical errors—you run the risk of sabotaging your previous efforts. Readers may assume that a piece of writing isn't worth their time if they're jolted by surface flaws that make it difficult to read. So, to make sure that your good ideas get a fair hearing (and as detailed in Figure 9.1 on page 140), you should do the following:

- Edit
- Use the appropriate manuscript format
- Proofread



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**FIGURE 9.1**  
**Process Diagram: Editing and Proofreading**



## EDIT CAREFULLY

When revising the paper, you probably spotted some errors in grammar, punctuation, or spelling, perhaps flagging them for later correction. Now—after you're satisfied with the essay's organization, development, and style—it's time to fix these errors. It's also time to search for and correct errors that have slipped by you so far.

If you're working with pen and paper or on a printed draft with handwritten annotations, use a different color ink, so your new corrections will stand out. Because most writers find it easier to locate errors on unmarked text, you may want to make changes and corrections you've already noted and then produce a clean copy of your text for editing. If you use a computer, search for errors both on the screen and on a printout. If your software includes a spelling check, your search for misspellings will be greatly simplified. Be aware, however, that such programs may not find errors in the spelling of proper nouns, and that they won't flag errors that constitute legitimate words (for example, *he* when you meant *the* or *their* when you meant *there*).

To be a successful editor of your own work, you need two standard tools: a grammar handbook and a good dictionary. One way to keep track of the errors

you're prone to make is to record them on a simple chart. Divide the chart into three columns: (1) *Error*, (2) *Rules for Correcting Error*, and (3) *Error Corrected*. When your instructor returns an essay, copy representative mistakes you've made into the first column. Look up in a handbook the rules that apply and enter them in the second column. Then, in the last column, rewrite the phrase or sentence from your paper with the error corrected. As the semester goes on, you'll develop a *personalized inventory* of writing errors to use in checking your own work.

If you're weak in spelling, make a similar inventory of spelling errors and corrections. Use four columns for this list: (1) *Word Misspelled*, (2) *Part of Word Misspelled*, (3) *Spelling Rule*, and (4) *Word Corrected*.

## USE THE APPROPRIATE MANUSCRIPT FORMAT

After correcting all grammar and spelling problems, you're ready to produce the final copy. In doing so, you should follow accepted academic practice, adapted to your instructor's requirements. Most instructors will require that you type your papers. Even if this isn't the case, computer-printed papers look neater, are easier to grade, and show that you have made the transition to college-level format.

The following checklist on manuscript format describes the basic rules for college essays. In addition, check for any specific format preferences your instructor may have.



### APPROPRIATE MANUSCRIPT FORMAT: A CHECKLIST

- Use standard-sized (8½ by 11 inches), white printer paper.
- Use a standard, text-style font, such as Times Roman or Courier, in 12-point size. Align text at the left only, not at the left and right.
- Use only black ink for text. Illustrations, such as charts and graphs, may be printed in color.
- Leave one-inch margins at the top, bottom, left, and right.
- Double-space all text, including extracts, notes, bibliographies, and Works Cited and References lists.
- Use the computer's page-numbering feature to add a header, one-half inch from the top of the sheet, that gives your last name followed by a space and then the page number. Do not use "page" or "p." Align the header at the right. The header should appear on all pages of the essay starting with the first page of text. The title page, if you use one, is not numbered and does not have a header.

- If you include a title page, place the title about one-third of the way down the page. Enter the title, and double-space between lines of the title and your name. Give the course and section, instructor's name, and date on separate lines, double-spaced and centered.
  - If you don't include a title page, use a standard heading, as specified by your instructor, at the top of the first page. One standard format for the heading consists of your name, the instructor's name, the course title, and the date on double-spaced lines in the top left corner of the page.
  - Center the title of your paper one double-space below the heading. Capitalize only the first letter of all main words. Don't use all caps, underlining, quotation marks, or bold type. Double-space a title having more than one line.
  - Double-space between the title and the first paragraph of your essay.
  - Indent the first line of each paragraph one-half inch, the default setting for most word-processing software.
  - Place any illustrations as close as possible to their mention in the text. Position a caption, consisting of "Figure" or "Fig.," a number, and a title or description, below the illustration.
  - Print on only one side of each sheet of paper.
  - Paper-clip or staple the pages, placing the outline wherever your instructor requests. Don't use the "folded corner" method; it doesn't hold, and it spoils the look of a carefully typed paper.
  - Don't use a report cover unless your instructor requests one.
  - If you are sending the essay by e-mail, follow your instructor's directions for naming the file. At the least, the file name should contain your own name and a class identifier—course abbreviation and section number, for example.
  - Keep a backup copy of the essay on a disc or external hard drive.
- (For examples of correct MLA and APA manuscript format, see pages 612–628 and 630–631.)

## PROOFREAD CLOSELY

**Proofreading** means checking your final copy carefully for "typos" or other mistakes. One trick is to read your material backward: If you read from the end of each paragraph to the beginning, you can focus on each word individually to make sure no letters have been left out or transposed. This technique prevents you from getting caught up in the flow of ideas and missing small defects, which is easy to do when you've read your own words many times.

What should you do when you find a typo? Simply use a pen with dark ink to make an above-line correction. The following standard proofreader’s marks will help you indicate some common types of corrections:

Proofreader’s Mark	Meaning	Example
^	insert missing letter or word	television
o	delete	reports the <del>the</del> findings
z	reverse order	the gang’s here all
¶	start new paragraph	to dry. ¶ Next, put
#	add space	the#girls
()	close up space	boy cott

If you make so many corrections on a page that it begins to look like a draft, make the corrections and reprint the page for fresh review.

## STUDENT ESSAY: FROM PREWRITING THROUGH PROOFREADING

In the last several chapters, we’ve taken you through the various stages in the writing process—from prewriting to proofreading. You’ve seen how Harriet Davids used prewriting (pages 24–32) and outlining (page 33) to arrive at her thesis (pages 38 and 41–42) and her first draft (pages 86–87). You also saw how Harriet’s peer reviewer, Frank Tejada, critiqued her first draft (page 100). You then observed how Harriet revised, first, her draft’s overall meaning and paragraph development (page 106) and, second, its sentences and words (page 135). In the following pages, you’ll look at Harriet’s final draft—the paper she submitted to her instructor after completing all the stages of the writing process.



Harriet, a thirty-eight-year-old college student and mother of two teenagers, wanted to write an informative paper with a straightforward, serious tone. While preparing her essay, she kept in mind that her audience would include her course instructor as well as her classmates, many of them considerably younger than she. This is the assignment that prompted Harriet’s essay:

Goodman implies that, in some ways, today’s world is hostile to children. Do you agree? Drawing upon but not limiting yourself to the material in your pre-reading journal, write an essay in which you support or reject this viewpoint.

Harriet’s essay is annotated so you can see how it illustrates the essay format described in Chapter 6 (page 85). As you read the essay, try to determine how well it reflects the principles of effective writing. The commentary following the paper will help you look at the essay more closely and give you some sense of the way Harriet went about revising her first draft.

Harriet Davids  
 Professor Kinne  
 College Composition, Section 203  
 October 4, 2007

### Challenges for Today's Parents

#### Introduction

Reruns of situation comedies from the 1950s and early 1960s dramatize the kinds of problems that parents used to have with their children. On classic television shows such as Leave It to Beaver, the Cleavers scold their son Beaver for not washing his hands before dinner; on Ozzie and Harriet, the Nelsons dock little Ricky's allowance because he keeps forgetting to clean his room. But times have changed dramatically. Being a parent today is much more difficult than it was a generation ago. Parents nowadays must protect their children from a growing number of distractions, from sexually explicit material, and from life-threatening situations.

Thesis

Plan of Development

First supporting paragraph

Topic sentence

Today's parents must try, first of all, to control all the new distractions that tempt children away from schoolwork. At home, a child may have a room furnished with an MP3 player, television, and computer. Not many young people can resist the urge to listen to music, watch TV, go online or play computer games and IM their friends--especially if it's time to do schoolwork. Outside the home, the distractions are even more alluring. Children no longer "hang out" on a neighborhood corner within earshot of Mom or Dad's reminder to come in and do homework. Instead, they congregate in vast shopping malls, movie theaters, and gleaming fast-food restaurants. Parents and school assignments have obvious difficulty competing with such enticing alternatives.

Second supporting paragraph

Topic sentence with link to previous paragraph

Besides dealing with these distractions, parents have to shield their children from a flood of sexually explicit materials. Today, children can find pornographic websites and chat rooms on the Internet with relative ease. With the click of a mouse, they can be transported, intentionally or unintentionally, to a barrage of explicit images and conversations. Easily obtainable copies of sex magazines can be found at most convenience stores, many times alongside the candy. Children will not see the fuzzily photographed nudes that a previous generation did but will encounter the hard-core raunchiness of Playboy or Penthouse. Moreover, the movies young people view often focus on highly

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sexual situations. It is difficult to teach children traditional values when films show young people treating sex as a casual sport. Unfortunately, television, with its often heavily sexual content, is no better. With just a flick of the channel, children can see sexed-up music videos, watch reality-TV stars cavorting in bed, or watch cable programs where nudity is common.

4 Most disturbing to parents today, however, is the increase in life-threatening dangers that face young people. When children are small, parents fear that their youngsters may be victims of violence. Every news program seems to carry a report about a school shooting or child predator who has been released from prison, only to repeat an act of violence against a minor. When children are older, parents begin to worry about their kids' use of drugs. Peer pressure to experiment with drugs is often stronger than parents' warnings. This pressure to experiment can be fatal. Finally, even if young people escape the hazards associated with drugs, they must still resist the pressure to drink. Although alcohol has always held an attraction for teenagers, reports indicate that they are drinking more than ever before. As many parents know, the consequences of this attraction can be deadly--especially when drinking is combined with driving.

Third supporting paragraph

Topic sentence with emphasis signal

5 Within a generation, the world as a place to raise children has changed dramatically. One wonders how yesterday's parents would have dealt with today's problems. Could the Nelsons have shielded little Ricky from sexually explicit material on the Internet? Could the Cleavers have protected Beaver from drugs and alcohol? Parents must be aware of all these distractions and dangers yet be willing to give their children the freedom they need to become responsible adults. This is not an easy task.

Conclusion

References to TV shows recall introduction

## Commentary

### Introduction and Thesis



The opening paragraph attracts readers' interest by recalling some vintage television shows that have almost become part of our cultural heritage. Harriet begins with these examples from the past because they offer such a sharp contrast to the present, thus underscoring the idea expressed in her *thesis*: "Being a parent today is much more difficult than it was a generation ago." Opening in this way, with material that serves as a striking contrast to what follows, is a

common and effective strategy. Note, too, that Harriet's thesis states the paper's subject (being a parent) as well as her attitude toward the subject (the job is more demanding than it was years ago).

### Plan of Development

Harriet follows her thesis with a *plan of development* that anticipates the three major points to be covered in the essay's supporting paragraphs. When revising her first draft, Harriet followed peer reviewer Frank Tejada's recommendation (page 100) to put her thesis and plan of development in separate sentences. Unfortunately, though, her plan of development ends up being somewhat mechanical, with the major points being trotted past the reader in one long, awkward sentence. To deal with the problem, Harriet could have rewritten the sentence or eliminated the plan of development altogether, ending the introduction with her thesis.

### Patterns of Development



Although Harriet develops her thesis primarily through *examples*, she also draws on two other patterns of development. The whole paper implies a *contrast* between the way life and parenting are now and the way they used to be. The essay also contains an element of *causal analysis* since all the factors that Harriet cites affect children and the way they are raised.

### Purpose, Audience, Tone, and Point of View

Given the essay's *purpose* and *audience*, Harriet adopts a serious *tone*, providing no-nonsense evidence to support her thesis. Note, too, that she uses the *third-person point of view*. Although she writes from the perspective of a mother of two teenage daughters, she doesn't write in the first person or refer specifically to her own experiences and those of her daughters. You may recall that Frank flagged Harriet's unsustained reference to her children (page 100). In the final draft, Harriet follows his advice and omits mention of her kids. Instead, she adopts an objective stance because she wants to keep the focus on the issue rather than on her family.

What if Harriet had been asked by her daughters' school newspaper to write a humorous column about the trials and tribulations that parents face raising children? Aiming for a different tone, purpose, and audience, Harriet would have taken another approach. Drawing upon her personal experience, she might have confessed how she survives her daughters' nearly nonstop use of the computer, as well as the constant thumping sounds that emanate from the headphones of their MP3s, which seem to be permanently glued to their ears: she cuts off the electricity and hides her daughters' MP3 ear buds. This material—with its personalized perspective, exaggeration, and light tone—would be appropriate.

### Organization

Structuring the essay around a series of *relevant* and *specific examples*, Harriet uses *emphatic order* to sequence the paper's three main points: that a growing number of distractions, sexually explicit materials, and life-threatening situations

make parenting difficult today. The third supporting paragraph begins with the words, “Most disturbing to parents today . . . ,” signaling that Harriet feels particular concern about the physical dangers children face. Moreover, she uses basic organizational strategies to sequence the supporting examples within each paragraph. The details in the first supporting paragraph are organized *spatially*, starting with distractions at home and moving to those outside the home. The second supporting paragraph arranges examples *emphatically*. Harriet starts with sexually explicit materials that can be found on the Internet and ends with the “heavily sexual content” on TV. Note that Harriet follows Frank’s peer review advice (page 100) about omitting her first-draft observation that kids don’t get enough homework—or that they get too much busy work. The third and final supporting paragraph is organized *chronologically*; it begins by discussing dangers to small children and concludes by talking about teenagers. Again, Frank’s advice—to use a clearer time sequence in this paragraph (page 100)—was invaluable when Harriet was revising.

The essay also displays Harriet’s familiarity with other kinds of organizational strategies. Each supporting paragraph opens with a *topic sentence*. Further, *signal devices* are used throughout the paper to show the relationship among ideas: *transitions* (“*Instead*, they congregate in vast shopping malls”; “*Moreover*, the movies young people attend often focus on highly sexual situations”); *repetition* (“*sexual situations*” and “*sexual content*”); *synonyms* (“*distractions . . . enticing alternatives*” and “*life-threatening . . . fatal*”); *pronouns* (“*young people . . . they*”); and *bridging sentences* (“*Besides dealing with these distractions, parents have to shield their children from a flood of sexually explicit materials*”).

### Two Minor Problems

Harriet’s efforts to write a well-organized essay result in a somewhat predictable structure. It might have been better had she rewritten one of the paragraphs, perhaps embedding the topic sentence in the middle of the paragraph or saving it for the end. Similarly, Harriet’s signal devices are a little heavy-handed. Even so, an essay with a sharp focus and clear signals is preferable to one with a confusing or inaccessible structure. As she gains more experience, Harriet can work on making the structure of her essays more subtle.

### Conclusion

Harriet brings the essay to a satisfying *close* by reminding readers of the paper’s central idea and three main points. The final paragraph also extends the essay’s scope by introducing a new but related issue: that parents have to strike a balance between their need to provide limitations and their children’s need for freedom.

### Revising the First Draft

As you saw on pages 106 and 135, Harriet reworked her essay a number of times. For a clearer sense of her revision process, compare the final version of her conclusion (on page 145) with the original version reprinted here. Harriet wisely waited to rework her conclusion until after she had fine-tuned the rest of the essay.



The marginal annotations, ranked in order of importance, indicate the problems that Harriet and her editing group detected in the conclusion.

### Original Conclusion

① Paragraph seems tacked on

③ Boring sentence—too vague

② Inappropriate reference to Holden

Most adults love their children and want to be good parents. But it's difficult because the world seems stacked against young people. Even Holden Caulfield had trouble dealing with society's pressures. Parents must give their children some freedom but not so much that kids lose sight of what's important.

As soon as Harriet heard her paper read aloud during a group session, she realized her conclusion didn't work at all. Rather than bringing the essay to a pleasing finish, the final paragraph seemed like a tired afterthought. Frank, her peer reviewer, also pointed out that her allusion to *The Catcher in the Rye* misrepresented the essay's focus since Harriet discusses children of all ages, not just teens.

Keeping these points in mind, Harriet decided to scrap her original conclusion. Working at a computer, she prepared a new, much stronger concluding paragraph. Besides eliminating the distracting reference to Holden Caulfield, she replaced the shopworn opening sentence ("Most adults love their children . . .") with two interesting and rhythmical questions ("Could the Nelsons . . . ? Could the Cleavers . . . ?"). Because these questions recall the essay's main points and echo the introduction's reference to vintage television shows, they help unify Harriet's paper and bring it to a rounded close.

These are just a few of the changes Harriet made when reworking her essay. Realizing that writing is a process, she left herself enough time to revise—and to carefully consider Frank Tejada's comments. Early in her composition course, Harriet learned that attention to the various stages in the writing process yields satisfying results, for writer and reader alike.



## ACTIVITIES: EDITING AND PROOFREADING

1. Applying for a job, a student wrote the following letter. Edit and proofread it carefully, as if it were your own. If you have trouble spotting many grammar, spelling, and typing errors, that's a sign you need to review the appropriate sections of a grammar handbook.

Dear Mr. Eno:

I am a sophomore at Harper College who will be returning home to Brooktown this June, hopefully, to find a job for the summer. One that would give me further experience in the

retail field. I have heard from my freind, Sarah Snyder, that your hiring college studnets as assistant mangers, I would be greatly intrested in such a postion.

I have quite a bit of experience in retail sales. Having worked after school in a "Dress Place" shop at Mason Mall, Pennsylvania. I started their as a sales clerk, by my second year I was serving as assistant manger.

I am reliable and responsible, and truely enjoy sales work. Mary Carver, the owner of the "Dress Place," can verify my qualifications, she was my supervisor for two years.

I will be visiting Brooktown from April 25 to 30. I hope to have an oppurtunity to speak to you about possible summer jobs at that time, and will be available for interview at your convience. Thank-you for you're consideration.

Sincerley,  
Joan Ackerman  
Joan Ackerman

2. Retrieve the revised essay you prepared in response to either activity 11 or activity 12 in Chapter 8 (page 138). Following the guidelines described on the preceding pages, edit and proofread your revision. After making the needed changes, prepare your final draft of the essay, using the appropriate manuscript format. Before submitting your paper to your instructor, ask someone to check it for grammar, spelling, and typographical errors that may have slipped by you.

For additional writing, reading, and research resources, go to [www.mycomplab.com](http://www.mycomplab.com) and choose **Nadell/Langan/Comodromos' *The Longman Writer*, 7/e.**