

Ways to Watch Your Own Words

Some simple ways to check your own drafts can help ensure they are polished and professional before they're out there for all to see.

1. Be consistent.

Documents that lack consistency in style and usage leave the intelligent reader with a poor impression. If your style is to put a comma between every item in a list, do it in every list. If your preference is to initial cap job titles, do it in every instance. Pick a style and stick with it.

2. Read it out loud

When you read your draft out loud, you can better see how it will be understood by the reader. You can catch ungrammatical, awkward, or long sentences. If you gasp for air before you get to the end of a sentence, rewrite it so it's two sentences.

3. Let it rest.

After you've finished a draft, let it sit for a day or two. Then re-read what you've written. Unclear sentences will be more apparent to you. This gives you a fresh perspective to find and eliminate unnecessary words, catch inconsistencies, and clarify any ambiguous sentences.

4. Pay attention to your word processor.

Many word processors highlight misspelled words, double words, and even grammar that could be improved. If your word processor gives you this information, pay attention. There's no excuse for a typo, especially one that's been called to your attention.

5. Always proofread.

Word processors don't catch all typos. If you've inadvertently typed an actual word in place of the word you intended, such as *nor* instead of *not*, most word processors won't catch it. Also, if you've marked up a document and input the changes on the computer, print the new document and compare the markup with the printout. You may be surprised how easy it is to miss a change or two. It's well worth the time it takes to check.

© 2005 The Linguistic Edge. All Rights Reserved.

To request permission to reprint or excerpt this article, please contact permissions@linguisticedge.com.

The information presented in this article is intended to be accurate and authoritative information on the subject matter covered. It is provided with the understanding that The Linguistic Edge assumes no liability whatsoever in connection with its use.

