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*Proofreading & Editing*

# *Self-Editing Checklist for Stronger Writing*

CATCH COMMON MISTAKES. TIGHTEN YOUR PROSE.  
ELEVATE YOUR VOICE.

# *Introduction*



You've finished your draft—congratulations! That's a huge milestone. Now comes the next phase: self-editing.

But editing your own work can feel overwhelming. Where do you start? What should you focus on? And how do you make your writing clearer, sharper, and more effective without second-guessing every sentence?

This Self-Editing Checklist takes the guesswork out of the revision process. Whether you're working on a novel, short story, or nonfiction piece, this guide will help you:

- Identify common issues that weaken writing
- Strengthen your sentences and structure
- Clarify your message and enhance your voice
- Prepare your work for professional editing or submission


Think of it as your personal editing assistant—clear, practical, and designed to help you polish your work with confidence.

# WRITING

## *Step 1: Big Picture Review – Structure & Story Flow*

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- ☐ Does every chapter or section have a clear purpose?
- ☐ Do events unfold in a logical order?
- ☐ Are there any sections that drag or feel rushed?
- ☐ Are character goals and motivations clear?
- ☐ Is the tone and voice consistent throughout?

 **Tip:** Write a one-sentence summary of each chapter or section. Do they build logically and keep readers engaged?

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“Don’t get it right, get it written.” – James Thurber  
Pro Tip: Editing is where your voice becomes sharper, not where it disappears.





## *Step 2: Clarity & Readability*

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- ☐ Are your sentences easy to understand on the first read?
- ☐ Have you replaced vague words with specific ones?
- ☐ Have you removed jargon or overly complex phrasing (unless intentional)?
- ☐ Are transitions between paragraphs and scenes smooth?

 **Tip:** Read your work out loud. If you stumble, your reader might too.

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✦ **Did You Know?** Cutting just 10% of your draft can dramatically improve clarity. See Step 4 😊




## *Step 3: Word Choice & Style*

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- ☐ Have you eliminated filler words like just, really, very, and a bit?
- ☐ Are your verbs strong and active?
- ☐ Have you cut clichés or overused phrases?
- ☐ Do metaphors and similes make sense and add value?

 **Tip:** Use "Find" in your word processor to search for weak or repeated words.

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 **Mini Challenge:** Rewrite a paragraph using only active voice.



## *Step 4: Sentence-Level Clean-Up*

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- ☐ Have you varied sentence lengths for better rhythm?
- ☐ Are you avoiding too many long or run-on sentences?
- ☐ Have you removed redundancy (saying the same thing twice)?
- ☐ Are dialogue tags and punctuation used correctly?

 **Tip:** Try cutting 10% of your word count in this phase. You'll often tighten your writing without losing meaning.

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“The first draft is just you telling yourself the story.” – Terry Pratchett






## *Step 5: Grammar, Punctuation & Spelling*

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- ☐ Have you checked for common grammar mistakes (subject-verb agreement, verb tense consistency)?
- ☐ Is your punctuation correct, especially commas and quotation marks?
- ☐ Have you run a spell check—and also read manually for typos?
- ☐ Are homophones (your/you're, their/there/they're) used correctly?

 **Tip:** Don't rely solely on tools like Grammarly—they miss context-sensitive issues. Always double-check manually.

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 Did you know? Most bestselling novels go through 4–6 rounds of editing before publication.



## *Step 6: Consistency Check*

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- ☐ Are character names, locations, and timelines consistent?
- ☐ Are formatting choices (headings, fonts, spacing) uniform throughout?
- ☐ Do you stick to one POV and verb tense unless intentionally shifting?
- ☐ Is your dialogue formatting consistent?

 **Tip:** Create a “style sheet” for your project—track spellings, capitalizations, and details as you go.

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 **Challenge:** Open your manuscript to a random page. Find one thing to cut, and one thing to expand.






## *Step 7: Final Polish*

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- ☐ Does the opening hook the reader right away?
- ☐ Does the ending feel earned and satisfying?
- ☐ Are your chapter or section breaks well-placed?
- ☐ Have you let the piece sit before doing a final read-through?

 **Tip:** Give yourself space. Take a day (or a week) away before your final pass with fresh eyes.

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“Don’t try to figure out what other people want to hear from you; figure out what you have to say.” – Barbara Kingsolver

# *Conclusion*



Editing doesn't mean making your writing "perfect"—it means making it clearer, stronger, and more you.

Use this checklist as your guide through each round of revision. And when you've done all you can, Verity Proofreading and Editing is here to help with the next step.

Whether you need a professional polish or in-depth editorial feedback, we'll work with you to make your words shine.

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