STRATEGIES FOR EDITING AND PROOFREADING

No matter how many times you read a "finished" paper, you are likely to miss many of your most frequent errors. This handout will help you to proofread more effectively!

GENERAL STRATEGIES

Begin by taking a break. Allow yourself some time between writing and editing. Even a five-minute break is productive because it will help get some distance from what you have written. The goal is to return with a fresh eye and mind. The following strategies will help you *s l o w d o w n* as you read through a paper and will therefore help you catch mistakes that you might otherwise overlook. As you use these strategies, remember to work slowly. If you read at a normal speed, your eyes will not spot errors.

- **Read aloud**
  Reading a paper aloud encourages you to read every word.

- **Read with a "cover"**
  Sliding a blank sheet of paper down the page as you read encourages you to make a detailed, line-by-line review of the paper.

- **Roleplay**
  Playing the role of the reader encourages you to see the paper as your audience might.

PERSONALIZED STRATEGIES

In addition to using the general strategies already listed, you need to personalize the process.

- **Find out what errors you typically make.** Review instructors' comments about your writing and/or review your paper(s) with a SAW Mentor.

- **Learn how to fix those errors.** Talk with your instructor and/or with a SAW Mentor; they can help you understand why you make the errors you do so that you can learn to avoid them.

ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Use the following strategies to find and correct errors in (1) organization and paragraphing, (2) usage and sentence structure, and (3) spelling and punctuation:

(1) Organization and Paragraphing

Thesis/Focus/Main Point
1. Find your paper's thesis statement. Copy it on another sheet of paper. If your thesis is not directly stated, write down a possible thesis.
2. Locate the central idea of each paragraph and try to reduce that idea to a word or phrase. If you cannot decide on one phrase, list two to three options.

3. List the paragraph ideas. List these in order under your thesis.
4. Decide whether your paragraphs clearly relate to your thesis. If not, either rewrite your thesis to incorporate the unrelated ideas or eliminate the unrelated paragraphs.

Paragraph Clarity
1. Locate the central idea of each paragraph. Reduce that idea to a word or phrase.
2. Look at each paragraph randomly. Consider only the information in that paragraph.
3. Ask yourself whether you offer enough details in the paragraph to support that word or idea.
4. Decide whether all of your details are relevant.
5. Ask yourself whether all of the information is related enough to be in the same paragraph. Should you create another paragraph or move some of the details to another paragraph?

Overall Coherence
See whether you have clear transitions between paragraphs. If not, clarify existing transitions, add new ones, and/or rearrange your paragraphs to make transitions clearer.

(2) Usage and Sentence Structure

Subject/Verb Agreement
1. Find the main verb in each sentence.
2. Match the verb to its subject.
3. Make sure that the subject and verb agree in number.

Pronoun Reference/Agreement
1. Skim your paper, stopping at each pronoun. Look especially at it, this, they, their, and them.
2. Search for the noun that the pronoun replaces. If you can't find the noun, insert one beforehand or change the pronoun to a noun. If you can find a noun, be sure it agrees in number and person with your pronoun.

Parallel Structure
1. Skim your paper, stopping at key words that signal parallel structures. Look especially for and, or, not only...but also, either... or, neither...or, both...and.
2. Make sure that the items connected by these words (e.g., adjectives, nouns, phrases) are in the same grammatical form.

(3) Spelling and Punctuation

Spelling
1. Examine each word in the paper individually. Move from the end of each line back to the beginning. Pointing with a pencil helps you really see each word. <u>DO NOT RELY ON SPELL CHECK</u>. Your computer may change a word to a closely spelled word that is very different in meaning to the word you wrote.
2. If necessary, check a dictionary.

Compound Sentence Commas
1. Skim for the conjunctions and, but, for, or, nor, so and yet.
2. See whether there is a complete sentence on each side of the conjunction. If so, place a comma before the conjunction.

Introductory Commas
1. Skim your paper, looking only at the first two or three words of each sentence.
2. Stop if one of these words is a dependent marker, a transition word, a participle, or a preposition.
3. Listen for a possible break point before the main clause.
4. Place a comma at the end of the introductory phrase or clause, which is before the independent clause.

Comma Splices
1. Skim the paper, stopping at every comma.
2. See whether there is a complete sentence on each side of the comma. If so, add a coordinating conjunction after the comma or replace the comma with a semicolon.

Fragments
1. Look at each sentence to see whether it contains an independent clause.
2. Pay special attention to sentences that begin with dependent marker words, such as because, or phrases such as for example or such as.
3. See if the text is only a piece of the previous sentence that mistakenly got separated.

Run-On Sentences
1. Review each sentence to see whether it contains more than one independent clause. Start with the last sentence of your paper, and work your way back to the beginning, sentence by sentence.
2. Break the sentence into two sentences if necessary.

Apostrophes
1. Skim your paper, stopping only at those words that end in s.
2. See whether or not each word needs an apostrophe. If an apostrophe is needed, you will be able to invert the word order and say "of" or "of the":
   • Mary's hat
   • the hat of Mary

Left-Out Words
1. Read the paper aloud, pointing to every word as you read. Don't let your eye move ahead until you spot each word.
2. Also, make sure that you have not doubled words.