Step Seven B: Editing (and a note about formatting)

While revising is a "big picture" look at a paper, editing gets down to the nitty gritty. We are going to drill down into word choice, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Don't be tempted to skip this step. Editing is a bit like window washing. If the window is dirty, you can't see the view. Don't let poor grammar obstruct the content of your paper.

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When editing, it can be helpful to print your paper out or read it aloud. Engaging with it in a different way can often reveal aspects that you didn't notice before.

1. *Gauge your grammar*
   - ☐ Do all sentences include an independent subject, a verb, and express a complete thought?
   - ☐ Are there any run-on sentences—sentences with more than one independent clause?

     Problem: *I love to write papers I would write one every day if I could.* **Solutions:** *(1) Two separate sentences: I love to write papers. I would write one every day if I could. (2) Join with a common and coordinating conjunction: I love to write papers, and I would write one every day if I could. (3) Join with a semicolon: I love to write papers; I would write one every day if I could. (4) Turn one phrase subordinate: Because I love to write papers, I would write one every day if I could.*
   - ☐ Do subjects and verbs agree in number? Singular nouns take singular verbs, and plural nouns, plural verbs.
   - ☐ Is your verb tense appropriate? Beware of any unnecessary shift in verb tense.
   - ☐ Are pronoun antecedents clear? Can your reader easily determine which noun the pronoun is referring to?

     Problem: When Tim and Greg joined the team, they were scared. Who was scared? Tim and Greg? The team? **Solution:** When Tim and Greg joined the team, the team was scared.

2. *Be precise with punctuation*

   We might feel confident with periods, but what about commas, semi-colons, colons, and dashes?

   ### Commas
   - Use with a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) to join two independent clauses (see above)
   - Use after introductory clauses, phrases, or words (Ex.: **If they want to be proficient,** musicians must practice every day.)
   - Use a pair of commas in the middle of a sentence to set apart a clause or phrase that is **not essential** to the meaning of the sentence (Ex.: Penguins**, birds without flight,** are native to the Southern Hemisphere.)
   - Use commas to separate three or more words, phrases, or clauses in a series (Ex: We had **peas, carrots, and broccoli** for dinner.)
   - Use a comma to separate two adjectives describing the same noun
   - Use commas to set off free modifiers. These are phrases and clauses that are non-essential to the sentence and can be placed in multiple locations. (Ex.: The test, **a comprehensive final,** lasted a full three hours. *OR* **A comprehensive final,** the test lasted a full three hours.)

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- Use commas to set off geographical names, items in dates, addresses, and titles in names
- Use a comma when shifting between the main discourse and a quotation
- Use commas when necessary to prevent confusion or misreading

Watch for comma splices. This occurs when two independent clauses are joined with a comma.

Colons and Semicolons

Use a colon (:) to introduce something that will follow, such as a quotation, an example, or a list. Use a semicolon (;) to join two independent clauses, to separate clauses joined by a conjunctive adverb (Ex.: The weather discouraged Zeke from riding his bike to school**; moreover,** he still needed to pump up his flat tire.), or to separate items in a list that already uses commas.

Dashes

The em dash can be used in the place of a comma, parenthesis, or colon. Em dashes can be used for emphasis. (Ex.: When the pizza was finally delivered—nearly three hours after being ordered—the cheese was so cold it looked like plastic.) You can create an em dash by typing a pair of hyphens followed by the next word. When you hit the space bar, the hyphens will be converted to an em dash.

Punctuation and quotation marks (Inside or outside?)

- Commas should always go inside quotation marks.
- Periods should go inside quotation marks unless followed by a citation.
- Explanation points and question marks should go inside the quotation marks if they are the terminal punctuation for the quote. If not, they should be outside of the quotation marks as the terminal punctuation of the sentence.

3. *Search for spelling errors*

   While word processing software is great at catching most spelling errors, beware of "right words" in the wrong places.

   - Typos—even just one letter off can make a huge difference in meaning
   - Homophones—words that sound the same but have different meanings. (rain/rein/reign, peak/peek, rites/rights; there/their/they're; your/you're; its/it's; two/too/to)
   - Commonly used words that sound similar—each one has a different meaning and usage (Ex.: then/than; accept/except; affect/effect)
   - Compound words—or not. Some words function in both ways but have different meanings. (Ex.: everyday/every day; altogether/all together)

4. *Work on words*

   Sweep for words that are frequently repeated. Use a thesaurus to find alternatives. Whenever you can, use precise language. However, beware of using words that you aren't familiar with as context matters.

5. *Format with finesse*

   Refer to style format guides for information on citing sources, page margins, fonts, headers, etc. Access these at https://www.mybriercrest.ca/college/documents/.

Next up...Do a final read through then turn your paper in!

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