

What I do when I copyedit

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Introduction

My editing work is a blend of rewriting, line editing, copyediting and proofreading, mostly in Word (in Track changes) (not LaTeX or PDF), occasionally with Tables or Figures in .ppt or .xls.

Line editing (a.k.a. stylistic or comprehensive editing): I focus on word choice, whether each sentence has the intended meaning, and how it flows into the next sentence. I clarify meaning, eliminate jargon and clichés, shorten run-on sentences, and ensure that each sentence sounds right.

Copyediting: I find and fix the spelling, punctuation, grammar, style and sentence construction mistakes. I also identify and fix small grammar issues that even some native English speakers may not know.

Proofreading: A proofread catches the errors that may remain after the line editing and copyediting. I look for typos, misplaced punctuation, and issues such as consistency in headings.

What I seek to do

- Turn on the *Track changes* setting before starting an edit.
- Remove multiple spaces and optional hyphens.
- Amend incorrect or unnecessary formatting (e.g. change underline to italic).
- Correct spelling errors and ensure the consistency of optional spellings.
- Delete redundant apostrophes in dates and abbreviations (e.g. 1990s instead of 1990's).
- Make specific s/z spelling changes (e.g. organis/zation).
- Indicate errors and inconsistencies found in the References section (without editing it).
- Check that each figure and table has a heading in the text and that these are consistently formatted.
- Make use of the *Find* function (not *Find and replace*).
- Make spelling, hyphenation, style and usage decisions; check grammar and punctuation.
- Unless there is a time or budget constraint, I print and read the hard copy and then make amendments to the file.
- Check that abbreviations and initialisations are explained upon first usage.
- Spell out abbreviations, except the most familiar (e.g. IT).
- If needed, I prepare a list of abbreviations and initialisations.

- Indicate in my Notes if there is inconsistent spacing between paragraphs.
- Check the numbering systems.
- Write out contractions (e.g. do not > don't, isn't > is not).
- Indicate in my Notes if the document contains text in another colour (e.g. red).
- Check for inconsistencies and contradictions in the author's argument.
- Check for misleading, ambiguous or incomplete sentences.
- If applicable, recommend in my Notes that the author check for any repetition and redundancies.
- Check for biases, parochialisms and stereotypes (e.g. by using they > he/she, he or she, or s/he).
- Check consistency of uses (e.g. YY% or YY percent).
- Change 'this country' to, say, 'Germany'.
- Indicate in my Notes whether the footnotes contain inconsistent line spacings and/or type-sizes.
- Check that dates are written consistently (e.g. 1 January 2022 or January 1, 2022).
- Recommend that the author change 'four years ago' to 'in 2020'.
- Check plural 's', possessive 's'; check possessives (e.g. Socrates's > Socrates').
- Check comma or space to indicate thousands.
- Change 1... 9 to one... nine, except for instance 8%; avoid Arabic numbers for months.
- Change decimal comma to point; indicate in my Notes uses of zero vs. no zero before decimal points.
- Check punctuation with closing quote (UK vs. U.S. English).
- Use the appropriate spellchecker (UK or U.S.) dictionary.
- Check or recommend that the author check the spellings of the names of persons, organisations, laws, etc. (especially those with two accepted forms).

The abstract

I pay particular attention to the abstract, which is the most read section of an article or dissertation, providing suggestions about what may be further included and/or implied therein. Effectively encapsulating research in an abstract usually involves repeated rewriting. With time pressure always being a factor, the risk is that the abstract is rushed.

An abstract has several purposes. It gives readers the gist of a manuscript quickly, so that they can decide whether or not they want to read it. It also prepares one to follow the information in the body text. Further, nowadays, search engines and online bibliographic databases use a title, abstract and keywords for indexing and cataloguing, allowing research to be easily discovered, read, used and cited by scholars who may not otherwise have been aware of it. If the abstract doesn't do its job, the reader may turn to others that do.

Guidelines for what to include in an abstract vary between paper types, journals, conferences and universities. Some even allow for a highlights aspect and/or a graphic aspect. The maximum allowed word counts and keywords also vary. The limited word count means that every word should be necessary.

What I don't do

- I do not screen files for viruses with antivirus software.
- I do not insert Comments in a document; I do not seek to detect or delete any (co-)author Comments.
- I do not change formatting, although I do point out inconsistencies in this regard.
- I do not check whether the sources of the figures and tables have been cited or cited correctly.
- I do not check cross-references.
- I do not check any matters of copyright, libel, legal matters, permissions or negligent misstatement (e.g. whether the author/s have acknowledged all sources, or the wording or position of acknowledgments, or whether they comply with copyright).
- While I note them when I spot them, I do not check for factual errors (e.g. correctness of names or dates).

Is your writing ready to make an impact in the world?

A linguistic call to arms is based on the fact that no one wants to read writing that's full of errors and inconsistencies. Great writing is a pleasure to read, makes you look good, and is good business. A good edit can be the difference between passing and failing, publication and rejection, and a cum laude and a summa cum laude. It also prevents a manuscript from being returned with the instruction to have it copyedited by a professional, with the resulting time loss.

To edit is to unlock a text's full potential and make its writing shine. A great edit has a profound effect on the quality of a text and the experience of its readers – superiors, peers, investors, examiners, institutions, promoters, friends, parents, prospective employers and others.

Based in South Africa, I'm a native English-speaking copyeditor and copywriter with years of experience across multiple fields and sectors. When I edit, I take responsibility for the text, as if I were a co-author. That is, I assemble hard-working sentences that can be inhaled like ice cream.

As at October 2024, I've assisted many authors to successfully submit to at least 91 academic journals and several conferences. For a list, see johangroble.com/journals/

I generate a Notes document that allows the corresponding author to 'contain' and swiftly sign off the document. This minimises the time and effort they need to invest in getting it publication-ready.

My clients include academics, consultants, university departments, and organisations concerned with policy, science and conservation in Europe, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Japan, Mexico, Qatar, South Korea, Taiwan, the UAE and the U.S. To see some clients' (unsolicited) feedback to my work, go to johangroble.com/testimonials/

Four of my clients are Editors or Associate Editors of academic journals, and I have worked on Editor introductions to journals. I have also done work for various sub-organisations of and individuals connected to the United Nations. I've also had the rare opportunity to edit a book chapter by Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel Peace Prize winner.

Feel free to request a quotation.

The sooner you contact me, the sooner I can assist you...