

Checklist for a Final Edit

There are several common mistakes that appear in the papers of college students. As we all know, too many mechanical mistakes can detract from the overall quality of your paper and result in a lower grade. So before you print up your paper, check through it for the following things:

Check Organization:

Make sure you follow your thesis throughout your paper, and check that your thesis is clearly stated in your introduction. An unclear or incomplete thesis will be the downfall of any paper.

Check your transitions to make sure that your paragraphs logically flow from one to the other.

Check to make sure your paragraph divisions make sense. Do not make a new

paragraph because the one you are working on seems too long. Begin a new paragraph when you begin discussing a new topic, and start it with a topic sentence.

Finally, try to avoid one-sentence paragraphs. Most paragraphs are at least three sentences long.

Check Usage:

- *Alot* is not acceptable as a single word. The proper phrase is "a lot," but that is a rather colloquialized and vague phrase. Be more specific.
- *Its* is a possessive pronoun. *Its characteristics are ...*
It's is the contraction for *it is*. *It's a worthwhile exercise to read this handout.*
- *Their* is always plural. *Their characteristics are ...*
There refers to location. [Remember *here* and *there*].
They're is the contraction for *They are*.
- Also check to make sure your nouns and verbs agree in tense and number.
Be very careful when using homophones (words that sound alike but mean different things, like *accept/except*, *affect/effect*.) If you are ever unsure if you are using the right word, check your dictionary or Writer's Web's Commonly Confused Words.
Check the paper for colloquial or slang phrases that will take away from the
- academic tone of your paper. Also be aware of using gender-neutral language, and substitute neutral words for masculine ones (for example, humanity for mankind, etc.)

When quoting material:

Periods and commas go inside the quotation marks.

Question marks, exclamation points, dashes, colons and semicolons are set outside the quotation marks (unless they are part of the quote).

When you are using a long quotation, check your system of documentation (MLA,

Turabian, APA, etc.) for how to define, indent, and space these long quotations.

Do not place blocked quotations in quotation marks. The indentation indicates that you are quoting.

Make sure you use a consistent method of citing sources, such as footnoting, endnoting, or MLA parenthetical citations. It is a good idea to ask your professors what their preferences are.

Some final, general hints:

Always use present tense when discussing a work.

In Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain employs various local dialects.

Use past tense when discussing events outside the work.

When Mark Twain wrote Huckleberry Finn, America was rapidly industrializing.

Read your paper aloud to check for:

run-on sentences

typographical errors

incomplete sentences

And finally:

Use your spell checker!