

Revision and Self-Editing

Foundations of Journalism

Emerson College

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Types of Editors

- Management
 - Oversee the entire paper or section
 - Budget and assign stories
- Copy editors
 - Read copy to make sure the story:
 - is correct (facts, grammar, spelling, style)
 - reads well
 - answers questions
 - doesn't leave outlet open to litigation

Editing

- Traditionally, a story was always read before it was put out for the public. In some cases, that is changing.
- Depends on platform
 - Print: A copy editor/some level of editor will read your story before publication
 - Web
 - Larger outlets: Copy editor/some level of editor will read your story before it posts
 - Smaller outlets: A copy editor/some level of editor may or may not read your story before it posts.
 - Reading content for editing purposes after it posts = Backreading.

Editing

- Smaller news rooms = fewer editors with more time constraints
 - 1/3 fewer journalists today than 5 years ago.
- Don't rely on an editor or copy editor to catch your mistakes.
 - The more mistakes you make --> the more time you require to edit --> the more you harm newsroom efficiency
 - Inevitable mistakes vs. Sloppy mistakes

Revision

- Handing in clean copy is essential.
- You'd ideally write perfect copy the first time, but often you just don't.
- Revision makes stories stronger.
- 2nd Draft = 1st draft - 10 %

Revision

- Allows you to catch typos and/or awkwardly written phrases/passages.
- Usually you will not follow:
Rough draft -->Revision-->Final draft
format you may have learned for essays, but same idea

Revision

- For features, you will ideally get it done enough in advance that you can do a draft version, then a revision.
- Other times, you will revise as you write. (This is a bit of an acquired skill.)
- Good writers are always self-editing.

Revision Strategies

- Write earlier.
 - Don't wait until the last second/up against deadline to write.
 - Write your story (esp. features) early, then you'll have time to revise.
 - This also will allow you to see where there might be holes/unanswered questions.

Revision Strategies

- Print your story out
 - You will be amazed by how many more mistakes, typos, etc. you catch when you're actually reading a printed version vs. a Word document.
- Read it aloud.
 - Again, you catch more errors when you actually read it aloud.
 - You'll also get a better idea of flow, particularly areas where it does not flow well.
 - This goes quadruple for broadcast.

Revision Strategies

- Take a break and come back to it
 - You'll be able to look at it with a fresh set of eyes. (And again, catch new mistakes.)
- Make notes of what you need to revise, then come back and revise it.
 - Note: “Stronger?” “Move”
 - Then come back and do that after you've finished full read-through.
 - Prevents you from getting caught in one spot and not getting through your story.

Revision Strategies

- Make sure your story accomplishes what it's supposed to accomplish.
 - Does it follow the angle/theme you've set out?
 - Does the lede set it up well?
 - Does the evidence support the lede?
 - Are you missing information?

Revision Strategies

- Fact check
 - Check spellings
 - Check facts (titles, locations, dates)
 - Check quotes (do they make sense?)
 - Check AP style
 - Check anything that can be checked.

Revision Strategies

- Get someone else to read your story.
 - An editor
 - A fellow journalist
 - A non-fellow journalist
 - Your mom
 - Sometimes all of the above
 - These people will be able to catch mistakes and/or give you suggestions as to how to make your story stronger.

Revision Strategies

- Realize that every story can be stronger.
 - Writing is an ever-evolving craft.
 - You can always improve something, strengthen somewhere, tighten something.
 - Part of revision is also knowing when to call it.
 - You can always improve it, but you've got to submit it at a certain point.

Rewrite

- There are multiple reasons for rewrite:
 - To make stronger
 - To make more clear
 - To make tighter
 - To make more active
 - Because you need to cut for length
 - To answer unanswered questions/fill holes

Rewrite

- Specific cases where you would look to rewrite:
 - Put less important clauses at the end
 - Example: On Tuesday night, President Barack Obama was re-elected.
 - President Barack Obama was re-elected on Tuesday night.

Rewrite

- To get rid of the passive voice
 - When you make the object of an action into the subject of a sentence.
 - Example: Many new politicians were elected by the voters on Tuesday night.
 - Active: Voters elected many new politicians on Tuesday night.

Rewrite

- When something does not make sense/could make better sense.
 - Example: The music school director said she wasn't completely sure when the \$1 million violin was stolen, but she thought the theft may have occurred when she left the music room briefly to answer a phone call.
 - Better: The music school director thought \$1 million violin may have been stolen when left the music room briefly to answer a phone call.

Rewrite

- To clarify whom/what a pronoun refers to.
 - Do not use she/he more than one after a person's name. (Alternate)
 - Make sure that he/she refers to whom you intend.
 - Avoid use of it.
 - What does it represent/refer to?

Rewrite

- Rewrites can be minor and/or comprehensive.

Scaffolding

- “Words, phrases and sentences that help the writer build.”
- Scaffolding helps us focus, organize and assemble our ideas.
 - Efforts should be made to remove from final version.
 - Can be used as a fallback/crutch

Scaffolding

- Questions
 - Does the question need to be blatantly asked in the writing or can the reader draw his/her own conclusion?

Scaffolding

- Transitions
 - We discussed the importance of transitions earlier* in the semester. But make sure transitional words/phrases are necessary.
 - Can the transition stand on its own? Could it be better written/stronger without the transitional phrase?

* See Powerpoints on Grammar and Structure

Scaffolding

- Parenthetical asides
 - Phrases that are directed at the reader
 - Of course, that is
 - Are these phrases necessary to your story?
 - Also, if using asides
 - They should be in em dashes -- or —, not ()
 - Also should they be asides or are they necessary to the text?
 - If necessary to the text, incorporate fully.

Headlines

- Copy editors are often responsible for writing headlines.
 - Depends on outlet
 - With blogs and writing on Web, more writers have to generate their own headlines
- Writers are often encouraged to offer suggested headlines.
 - By suggesting a headline, you can make sure the headline fits your story.
 - Nothing worse than a headline that doesn't fit your story
 - Copy editors will often ask writers for headline suggestions.

Headlines

- Hard news: Need to sum up the most important/key point of the story.
- Soft news: Room for creativity, but still needs to convey point of the story.

Headlines

- Nut graf summarizes story, headline summarizes nut graf.
- If using a subhead, it should highlight another element of your story than your headline.

Headline

- Don't repeat your lede in your headline verbatim.
- Limit use of question headlines.
- Don't write a headline/lede so that they rely on each other.
 - Headlines can be changed for different platforms or altogether.

Headlines

- Often there is a character count.
- Depending on the outlet/section headlines may be:
 - Snappy
 - Straight forward
 - Keyword heavy
 - SEO-friendly