

Lesson Skill: Editing and proofreading

Strand Writing

SOL 9.7
10.7
11.7
12.7

Materials

- The revised draft of student essays

Lesson

1. Instruct students that after a rough draft has been revised and edited, it is time to produce the final copy of the writing. This is the last step, and it involves proofreading. Emphasize that you should always allow some time to pass between writing and proofreading as it is easier to spot errors. There are several ways to make sure that you are not just doing a cursory “read-over” of your work—ways that will help catch the mistakes. In this lesson, you are going to look for three specific things as you read your own essay and a partner’s essay:
 - Use of the passive voice
 - Use of wordiness
 - Use of clichés.
2. **Passive voice:** Make sure each student understands the meaning of “active voice” and “passive voice,” reviewing as necessary. Tell them that sentences written in the passive voice are not wrong, they just tend to be less direct and more wordy. The writer sounds more assertive by writing in the active voice.

Have students read their own essays and change all instances of passive voice to active voice.
3. **Wordiness:** Essays should be written without a lot of “filler.” Sometimes students want to include “filler” so that their essay is longer or because they believe they will sound smarter if they use more words or longer phrases. However, generally a writer should say “because” instead of “due to the fact” or “now” instead of “at the present time.”

Changing passive voice to active voice helps eliminate wordiness. Sometimes sentences can be combined to help eliminate wordiness and pare down an essay. Many simple sentences that are related to one another can be combined into compound, complex, or compound-complex sentences. You should do this, however, only if you have not written the simple sentences on purpose for parallelism, repetition, or emphasis.

Have students read their own essays and look for words or phrases that can be eliminated and for sentences that can be combined.

4. Clichés: Review the meaning of cliché: an old saying that has lost its spark or verve and is now tired, worn out, and over-used. When you proofread your work, you look for clichés that you might not even realize you have used. Some common ones to look for are
- “last but not least”
 - “easier said than done”
 - “it goes without saying”
 - “your worst nightmare”
 - “been there, done that”
 - “clueless, sick and tired”
 - “nine times out of ten.”

Of course, there are many more.

Have students read their own essays and eliminate clichés.

5. After students have proofread for the three things above, have them read their papers backwards. Because the writing does not make sense that way, your eyes can see it afresh. Reading backwards causes you to see every word, so you are much more likely to find spelling errors.
6. Tell students that reading aloud helps find errors that you may have overlooked, even with thorough proofreading. It is often very revealing to hear our words read aloud. Therefore, have the finalized essays read aloud by partners. Have each partner read the essay of his/her partner aloud. Then have partners reverse roles.
7. Have students print the final copy only after it has been proofread carefully and thoroughly.