The Learning Centre

Essay Writing

Self-Editing

The editing of an essay is a very important step that may need to be done multiple times. If you are going to **self-edit**, leave your essay for a couple of days and then go back to it with a fresh set of eyes. When we are deeply involved with our essays, our minds will skip over or fill in sections that are awkward or missing. Moreover, when you do go back to read your essay, make sure to read it aloud – when read aloud, the awkward sentences and argument flaws become immediately obvious. Lastly, it is important to remember that there are different ways to edit a paper – by taking a **substantive** approach, and by taking **line** approach.

Substantive Editing

Substantive editing is a type of editing that pays attention to bigger-picture concerns. For example, a substantive editor looks for issues in flow, structure, and unity of an essay. Fortunately, you can become a substantive editor of your own essay as long as you keep your mind as open and unbiased as possible.

Here are some points to consider as a substantive self-editor:

- Take another look at the assignment and criteria, and then read through your essay as a whole. Have you covered everything that you needed to? Is the structure and context of your paper logical?
- Check your paragraph content. Are you expressing one idea per paragraph, or do you have a jumble of topics? Are the paragraphs set up in the most logical order?
- Compare your introduction, body and conclusion. Do you have a thesis that is reinforced and affirmed in the body of the paper? Does your conclusion reassert your argument and make sense in terms of what you've written in the body?
- Underline your thesis statement and read it carefully. Is it clear? Concise? Narrow enough to support the content of your paper?
- In each paragraph, underline your topic sentence at the beginning and your transition sentence at the end. Do they make sense, and work together to transition between topics? Or, do they sound repetitive and robot-like?

Line Editing

Line editing, on the other hand, is a type of editing that considers the small-scale issues. For example, a line editor looks for flaws in the grammar, sentence structure, and mechanics within an essay. In this case, you can become a line editor of your own essay as long as you know the rules of the English language.

Here are some points to consider as a line editor:

- Are there any sentence fragments or comma splices?
- Are you using the strongest words to express your thoughts? Are you using more words than you need to express a given idea?
- Is your word usage repetitive?
- Are you using proper punctuation and citing techniques in your bibliography?
- Are there any grammar or punctuation errors? Are you using colons, semicolons and commas properly?
- Are there any faulty subject-verb agreements?
- Are there any faulty parallel forms?

One last tip…

Try to edit your own paper <u>at least</u> three times before handing it in to your instructor. This is a technique most writers and scholars use to produce the best possible version of a paper, essay or story. After all, it is very rare to complete a flawless essay in the first draft, or even the second draft. Build upon each draft to make the essay better and better.