

CHECKLIST FOR A FINAL EDIT

Several mistakes are common 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 possible errors:

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 source you quote).
- When you are using a long quotation, check your system of documentation (MLA, Turabian, APA, etc.) for how to define, indent and space 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.

Checking 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. Ex: "Its characteristics are..."
- *It's* is the contraction of it is. Ex: "It's a worthwhile exercise to read this handout."
- *Their* is always plural. Ex: "Their characteristics are..."
- *There* refers to location. (Remember "here and there").
- *They're* is the contraction of they are.
- Also check to make sure your nouns and verbs agree in number.

Be very careful when using homophones (words that sound alike but mean different things, like *accept/except*, *effect/affect*.) If you are ever unsure if you are using the right word, check your dictionary. In addition, the Writing Center has a handout on Easily 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.)

Checking Organization:

- Make sure you follow your thesis throughout your paper and 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 one to the other.
- Check to make sure your paragraphing makes sense. Do not make a new paragraph because the one you are working on seems too long. In fact, many body paragraphs have ten to fourteen sentences. Begin a new paragraph when you begin discussing a new topic, starting with a topic sentence.
- Finally, try to avoid one-sentence paragraphs. Most paragraphs, even transition paragraphs, are at least three sentences long.

Using Present or Past Tense:

- Always use present tense when discussing a work of art or literature (called literary present). Ex: "In *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain employs various local dialects."
- Use past tense when discussing events outside the work of art. Ex: "When Mark Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn*, America was rapidly industrializing."

Read your paper aloud to check for

- run-on sentences
- typographical errors
- incomplete sentences