



HANSON WRITING & EDITING

805.546.9009

*Professional editorial services
for every client*

Nels Hanson
hanson@fix.net

Vicki Hanson
veh@impulse.net

WRITING / SELF-EDITING CHECKLIST: THE BASICS

Goals

Be clear, concise, concrete, and persuasive. *Show, don't tell.*

Preparation

- Identify the *purpose* of your document. Ask: "Why am I writing this?"
- Clearly identify your subject and audience and the appropriate vocabulary for both.
- Identify the *tone* you will use—formal, colloquial, technical, mainstream, etc.
- Determine the length of your report, article, announcement, memo, etc.
- Choose an effective title that announces your subject and *limits* its range.
- Write down* the main idea of your document *in a complete sentence*. This will force you to clarify your thinking. Remember that the main idea is your *opinion*—your "angle" on the subject.
- Make a "grocery list" of supporting points and details/examples that *prove* your main idea.

Structure

- Place the main idea sentence in the first or second paragraph of the document.
- Place a topic sentence (stating one point that supports the main idea) in each subsequent paragraph.
- Include at least one concrete detail/example for each supporting point.
- Use transition phrases at the beginnings/ends of paragraphs to link supporting points.
- Be sure your conclusion reflects the *ramifications* of the main idea and its supporting points.

Mechanics

- Check that each sentence has a subject and verb (in that order—avoid passive voice).
- Check that subject and verb match in number (singular or plural). *Nouns or pronouns within prepositional phrases can't serve as subjects* ("The group of men and women has arrived").
- Set a consistent verb tense and use as a reference for moving backward/forward in time.
- Vary the *beginnings* of your sentences and paragraphs. (Avoid "There is" and "There are.")
- Vary the *lengths* of your sentences and paragraphs. (For the latter, don't exceed six sentences.)

Special Tips

- Sentences should contain colors, shapes, proper nouns ("Albuquerque").
- Avoid word repetitions. They distract the reader (and indicate repeated ideas).
- Check to see if you can *cut* words without losing necessary information. (You always can.)
- The ear catches what the eye misses: Read aloud for grammar, flow, effect.
- Rewrite and always ask for a reader response.