



Why the Writing Center Does Not Edit or Proofread For You

The Writing Center offers a teaching, not a proofreading service. Our goal is to help you become more comfortable, confident, and capable by talking with you about ways you can improve your own writing. This means we won't simply edit papers for you.

So how can we help? Why don't we just proofread for you? This handout explains what we mean by editing and how our consultants can help you improve your writing by teaching you to revise and edit yourself.

What is editing?

Editing involves carefully rereading a draft to ensure that your writing is "correct." Editing, in other words, involves proofreading your writing to ensure that it meets standard writing conventions regarding punctuation, mechanics, spelling, and sentence structure. This process is an important last step in writing a successful paper. One way to effectively edit your papers is to read them out loud, checking to see that all words are spelled correctly, every sentence is complete, all punctuation is correct, and no words are inadvertently omitted.

What is revising?

Revising involves a "re-vision" of your paper. When you revise you assess how effectively your writing achieves a desired purpose for a particular audience. This process entails an evaluation of whether each sentence and paragraph accomplishes your intended goals. When you revise you examine the paper's thesis (or main claim), supporting evidence, development, organization, paragraph structure, and coherence. One excellent way to revise is to solicit responses from your friends, roommates, professors—and Writing Center consultants. Feedback from others shows you how different readers react to your writing, which helps you "re-vision" the paper through your readers' eyes. It is only after revising that you are ready to edit.

Why peer consultants teach you to revise and edit instead of doing it for you

If we did revise and edit your writing, you might end up with a more polished paper, but you wouldn't understand what we had done to improve it. You wouldn't know *why* your writing was better, just that it was better. As a result, you would be unable to improve your writing by yourself. However, when we teach you to revise and edit, you not only learn how to make one particular paper better, but you learn how to improve every single paper you write! You improve not only the paper you bring to the Writing Center, but also your overall writing skills. Therefore, consultants will ask you questions to help you, for example, clarify your thesis, expand the analysis of your evidence, understand the requirements of your assignment, test the clarity of your definitions, and find and correct your own grammatical errors.

An example

This example illustrates how an editor and a writing consultant would respond differently to a piece of writing. Below is a paragraph from an essay with the thesis statement underlined.

"In this composition, I define the young people as persons whose age is up to about my age and the old people as persons whose age is about my parents' age or who are members of the society I will tell the difference between young people and old people, which based on my experience and people around me, and which is focused by me as a young people."

An **editor** would make the following changes for the writer:

"In this composition, I define ~~the~~ young people as persons whose age is up to about my age and ~~the~~ old people as persons whose age is about my parents' age or who are members of ~~the~~ society. I will tell the difference between young people and old people, which is based on my experience and people around me, and which is focused by me as a young person."
through my eyes

A **writing consultant or teacher** would help the writer to revise her own work by asking questions such as those below:

- What does your assignment ask you to do?

For our example the writer replies that her sociology assignment asks her to compare modern young adults' projections about getting a high-paying job and owning a house with similar projections made by middle-aged Americans thirty years ago. The consultant then asks the writer to clarify her thesis to more directly address this comparison. The writer and consultant eventually discuss how describing "the difference between young people and old people" is very different (and much broader) than analyzing the differences between American college students' current projections and their parents' past dreams of attaining a middle-class lifestyle.

After the writer writes a new thesis statement to meet the assignment's expectations, the consultant might ask the following questions about the writer's opening sentence:

- What do you mean by "young"? To what ages does this refer?
- What do you mean by "old"? To what ages does this refer?
- How would you define "society"? Does society include young people?

To address sentence level errors, the consultant might ask the writer to read through this passage and circle any articles she is unsure about. The consultant and writer could then discuss the three unnecessary *thes* ("*the* young people," "*the* old people," and "*the* society").

You will not learn by the consultant editing your work for you, but you will learn by making changes yourself in response to informed questions from the consultant.