

INKWELL



THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE WRITING CENTER
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MT. EDIT

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Editing, like all the other stages of writing, is part of a larger process and as a result cannot be reached by taking short cuts. For me, the writing process is like hiking through a wilderness that has no clearly marked trails. Brainstorming, drafting, and revising are the stages that allow writers to forge a trail to their desired destination. Editing is the breathtaking view at the end of an enjoyable yet strenuous hike, for editing is the stage that enables writers to extract and illuminate the underlying essence of a piece.

As a tutor, I often speak with students who are eager to edit their piece, and it doesn't surprise me because when I think about the stage of writing that appeals to me the most, I always find myself gravitating toward the editing stage. Although I enjoy writing, it is not something that is easy for me. In fact, more often than not, I find myself procrastinating when it comes to writing because I know writing is not about instant gratification. Writing is a gradual progression that helps to unravel the mystery of a particular idea. Whether it is a personal narrative, poetry, prose, or an academic essay, the decision to take on writing as a means of expression comes with the need for time and patience. However, I like to think of editing as the long awaited panoramic view that inspires writers to reflect on all that has been said, and to hone in on all of the poetic peaks of a piece.

Although editing can be referred to as the high point of the writing process, it is by no means the end, for in order to be able to share the beauty of an amazing journey, writers must make it back down the trail of proofreading in a cautious and mindful way. However, because arriving at the mountaintop vista requires a healthy dose of patience and endurance, I like to encourage readers to revel in the wonder that is making it to the editing stage and to take the time to reflect on all of their hard work and efforts by asking them to search for the inherent beauty of their ideas and to work on threading that beauty throughout the entirety of their piece.

While gazing from atop the editing peak, writers are rewarded with an opportunity to revisit the trail that led them to their current destination. Editing is the stage that asks writers to look at each individual sentence in order to identify whether each sentence is helping to guide readers forward. Is each sentence contributing to the forward movement of the piece? Or is there a sentence that forces readers to circle around in a confusing manner? Are there sentences that ask the reader to carry more information than is necessary or helpful, especially in terms of the larger picture?

Are there areas that can be further explored in terms of vocabulary? Would using a thesaurus help expand your understanding of language and provide your reader with an opportunity to read something fresh?

One of my favorite exercises to do with writers when they come into the Writing Center is to have their piece read aloud. I like to remind them that language was an oral tradition before it was translated into the written form. Having a piece of writing read aloud can prove to be an incredibly transformative experience because it requires writers to breathe life into their words and by doing so places them in the position of both the writer and the reader. Reading a piece aloud allows writers to feel the weight of each word and to reflect on the auditory effect of each sentence. More often than not, if a sentence does not feel good on your tongue, it's probably not going to feel good to the reader.

Ultimately, I like to make the distinction between editing and proofreading by saying that editing is solidifying the poetic resonance of a piece, while proofreading is about polishing the grammatical and visual aspects. Editing is about creating a piece of writing that encourages both the reader and the writer to engage in the sensual and ideological journey of a piece. Editing is about clearing the underbrush from the path you created in order reach the pinnacle of your ideas.