



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM



Editing and proofreading

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Session aim

- We will explore the editing, checking and polishing stage of writing, help you to figure out the drafting stages you need to take your essays through, and consider how to make your writing clearer and more concise.



The editing process

Self-assess:

How well do you edit and proofread your work?

DO you edit and proofread your work?



The editing process

Three levels of checking:

- Essay
- Paragraph
- Sentence



A checklist for editing

Editing at the essay level

- ❑ Assess whether your structure is effective. If necessary, shuffle paragraphs and sections around to achieve the most logical flow.
- ❑ Add in signposting phrases (transition words) to guide your reader through the essay. See [Academic Phrasebank](#).
- ❑ Improve the links between paragraphs/ sections.
- ❑ Check that the arguments made in the main body are reflected in the conclusion.



A checklist for editing

Editing at the paragraph level

- ❑ Re-visit individual sections and re-write to make them clearer.
- ❑ Improve the internal structure and sequencing of each paragraph.
- ❑ Make sure each paragraph has a strong, clear opening sentence, and a concluding sentence that shows its relevance to the question.
- ❑ Make sure each paragraph is just making one main point, and that the point is fully developed, evidenced and discussed.



A checklist for editing

Editing at the sentence level

- ❑ Check sentences aren't too long or too confusing.
- ❑ Reduce the number of words and streamline the writing.
- ❑ Proofread for spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- ❑ Carefully check references. See [Cite Them Right](#) and/or [iCite Guide](#).



Editing strategies

- Leave a few days between the writing and editing stages to allow yourself to look at your work through fresh eyes.
- Print off to do your editing.
- Go through crossing out any words or sentences that are serving no purpose, but **not** material that advances your argument or helps to make things clear to your reader.



Editing strategies

- ❑ Often adverbs such as “slightly” or “extremely” can be cut. Make your verbs do their job so you don’t have to keep qualifying them.
- ❑ Copy and paste any clumsy sentences onto a separate document and play around with them to find a more streamlined structure.
- ❑ Read the whole essay aloud to check the flow.
- ❑ Keep anything you cut out in a separate document called “scrap,” just in case you ever need it again. This will also make it less painful to trim your work!



Editing a paragraph

- Separate document
- Line breaks
- Check for overly-long sentences
- Check sequencing
- Check for repetition of ideas
- Check for relevance



The M.J. Hyland method

- Print in completely different font (a weird one)
- Make font larger
- Give your writing distance – make it alien
- Revert for final check



The B.B.C. method (Build, Blur, Corrode)

- **Build:** this text actively advances the argument being made. It makes a new point, takes a previous point further, develops a new angle, offers fresh evidence or explains important detail—so as to advance readers' understanding.
- **Blur:** text that does not clearly advance the argument, perhaps because it is repeating something already said, connecting back to an earlier point, or waffling around unimportant detail.
- **Corrode:** text that is a liability. It might be theoretically incorrect, factually wrong, un-evidenced or illogical. It could be completely 'correct' but misplaced—an intrusion or digression that obscures the main line of argument. In academic work a sentence or paragraph can also be corrosive if it is inappropriate, badly written, or uses the wrong specialist vocabulary. Corrosive sections can undermine your ideas and give an impression of sloppiness.



The B.B.C. method (Build, Blur, Corrode)

Decide if each sentence or paragraph **builds**, **blurs** or **corrodes** your argument, then take the following steps:

- ❑ **Expand the ‘build’ material.**
- ❑ **Minimise the ‘blur’ material.**
- ❑ **Eliminate or radically upgrade all the corrosive material.**



Editing practice

Activity: test your skills

- **Try editing the paragraph. What mistakes can you spot? What sentences can you rephrase or tighten up?**



Activity: answers

There is much debate over the optimal time period to sustain a stretch. Studies suggest that stretches are more effective if held for longer periods of time, but not all of the research can be applied to patients with MS. Bandy and Irion (2007) examined the length of time a muscle should be sustained in a stretched position to maximally increase flexibility. They compared the effect of holding a stretch for 15, 30 or 60 seconds on 57 subjects with limited hamstring muscle flexibility, once daily, for a 6 week period. The results showed 30 or 60 seconds to be the most effective time period in terms of increasing the range of motion. Similarly, a study by Roberts and Wilson (2009) investigated the effect of stretching duration in muscles of the lower limb, and discovered that 15 seconds was more beneficial than 5. However, these studies don't give a long term view into the effect of stretching as they only ran for 5 and 6 weeks, which is significant in a condition such as MS as it is chronic. Therefore, a longer-term look into the effects of stretching would be more viable. Furthermore, the average age of participants in the first study was 20, whereas MS has its peak incidence between the ages of 25 and 35 (Stokes, 2004). It seems that further research into the long term effects of stretching, on a more representative range of patients, would help physiotherapists to improve their treatment of patients with MS.

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Key errors from the above

- Punctuation, spelling and grammar e.g. apostrophes where there shouldn't be; wrong sort of "its"; comma splices and fragmented sentences. For more on grammar and punctuation, see other hand-out.
- Inconsistency – e.g. in whether numbers are presented as words or figures
- Incorrect formatting of references – when the author's name is mentioned in the text, only the year of publication needs to go in brackets
- Informal language and use of contractions (e.g. "don't")

Academic Skills Centre

Location

1st floor, main library

Telephone

(0121) 414 3666

Email

asc@contacts.bham.ac.uk

Web

intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/libraryservices/library/skills/asc/index.aspx

The screenshot shows the University of Birmingham Intranet page for the Academic Skills Centre (ASC). The header includes the University of Birmingham logo, the text 'UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM | INTRANET', and navigation links for 'Main website', 'Login', 'For students', and 'For staff'. A search icon is also present. The breadcrumb trail reads: 'University of Birmingham Intranet > Academic Services > Library Services > Library > Skills and training > Academic Skills Centre'. The main heading is 'Academic Skills Centre (ASC)'. The page is organized into a grid of service tiles. The first row includes 'Academic skills' (with an icon of a book and pen), 'Mathematics Support Centre' (with mathematical symbols ω , π , \sum , $x(y^2)$, ϕ , δ , and the number 3.14159265359), and 'Library and information skills' (with an icon of an open book). The second row includes 'Digital Skills' (with an icon of a person at a computer), 'One-to-one appointments' (with an icon of two people at a table), and 'PASS' (with an icon of three people). The third row includes 'Academic Skills Gateway', 'Feedback', and 'Contact us'. On the right side, there is a sidebar titled 'In 'Academic Skills Centre'' with a list of links: 'Academic Skills Centre', 'New Taught Student Welcome events', 'Events and workshops', 'Transition to University', 'Mature undergraduate students', 'Taught Postgraduates', 'What to expect', 'ASC resources', 'Top tips for revision', 'Appointments', 'Maths Support', 'Academic skills support', and 'Contact us'.



Academic Skills Gateway

The screenshot displays the Academic Skills Gateway website. At the top, a navigation bar includes links for Home, Learning how to learn, Maths and statistics, Research skills, Working with others, and Writing skills. The main content area is a grid of service tiles: 'Learning how to learn' (lightbulb icon), 'Maths and statistics' (maths icon), 'Research skills' (magnifying glass icon), 'Working with others' (group icon), and 'Writing skills' (pen nib icon). A footer section contains the University of Birmingham and Library Services logos. On the right sidebar, the 'Academic Skills Centre' section lists 'Confidential 1-1 appointments' (with links for Academic Skills and Digital Skills), 'Workshops and classes' (with links for Academic Skills and Digital Skills workshop registration), 'Library and Information Skills' (with a list of college-specific guides), and 'Stand-alone resources' (with links for Guide to Effective Learning, transitioning to postgraduate studies, and Skills4Study Campus). Below this are buttons for 'Feedback', 'Accessibility', 'Mathematics Support Centre', and 'FindIt@Bham'.



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