

Editing is essential to writing well. If you edit systematically, you will improve your work markedly. Budget **50%** of your writing time for editing. (I.e., when you complete your first draft, you are only half done.) My friends and professional writers, Ann Vileisis and Tim Palmer, do their editing in roughly 30 steps. Below is a condensed version in eleven steps. (Adapted from a graduate course on environmental writing that we taught together at the Teton Science School, Winter 1995).

1. Spell Check: Correct distracting spelling errors and blatant grammatical problems. Eliminate these errors first; they would distract you during latter steps anyway. Proofread hard copy, or use the spell-checking utility on your word-processing program.
2. Meta-edit: Read through your work, checking for sequence and logic. Eliminate unimportant or unnecessary parts. A big time saver: do not waste time doing fine edits of sections that you will discard later.
3. Transition Edit: Make sure that each paragraph leads to the next. Guide your reader through your work.
4. Grammar & Punctuation Check: Look up and correct any questionable grammar. (n.b. non-parallel phrases, run-on sentences)
5. Trim the Fat: Eliminate extra phrases, adjectives, and adverbs; streamline where possible. Challenge every word. Ask yourself: "What if I removed that word? Would it change the meaning of my writing?" If the answer is no, cut it!
6. Lead Read: Read the first sentence of each paragraph. Make sure it grabs you (especially the first paragraph in your work). (This is fun to do.) Read 1st sentence of each paragraph, and skim the rest. Edit to make 1st sentence special, catchy. Your writing should make sense after reading only the first sentence of each paragraph.
7. Verb Read: Scan through your work for verbs. Substitute interesting, accurate, and active verbs for dull, vague, or passive ones. Challenge every verb. Specific/explicit verbs are better than general verbs. E.g., "She ran." or "She hustled." instead of "She went." Using active verbs may require you to restructure sentences. Take care not to lose subject of sentence. E.g., "The batter hit the ball." is better than "The ball was hit by the batter." unless your story is about the ball.
8. Meaning Check: Consult the dictionary if you are not *certain* of the meaning of a word. Make sure that phrases mean precisely what you want them to mean.
9. Colorful Language Edit: Are there concepts you can explain metaphorically? Careful with this; metaphors can be misleading in technical writing.
10. Read Aloud Edit: Does it sound good? Your ear may detect subtle rhythms and phrases that do not work well.
11. Friend Edit: Find a thoughtful, kind friend to read your work and offer suggestions. Accept your friend's impressions with an open mind. (Accept critique graciously: remember that anyone who edits your work is doing you a valuable favor.)