

TAKE YOUR WRITING TO THE NEXT LEVEL:

20 EDITING TIPS FROM PROFESSIONAL WRITERS

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INTRODUCTION

Whether you are writing a novel, essay, article or email, good writing is an essential part of getting your readers to understand your ideas.

In this e-book you will find the best tips and techniques from a wide range of professional writers. Some focus on the minutia of specific word selection; others focus on the more complex ideas like finding the right metaphor, policing your work for Purple Prose, or figuring out when it's time to send it off to potential publishers.

Before you begin your first edit (and indeed all future edits), we recommend taking some time away from the text, so that when you come back to edit and redraft, you will be much more able to see what's actually there rather than what you meant to get across.

When you are ready, focus on one tip at a time. Make one session just about "adverb eradication" and then go through as much of your text as you can on just that element. Your brain will get in "strong verb" gear and it will get easier as you go along. If you try to cover every tip for every paragraph, it's easy to lose focus. Too many writers have very strong beginnings followed by mediocre middles and terrible endings simply because they have run out of editing steam. Choose small bite-sized goals and go from top to bottom.

Remember that editing often takes as long or longer than writing, so be prepared to put the time in. We promise that you will not regret it.

TIP #1

USE ADVERBS VERY CAREFULLY

Adverbs are words that add color or emphasis to a verb.

Compare these sentences:

- The barista **made** a cup of coffee.
- The barista **grumpily made** a cup of coffee.

The adverb “grumpily” offers an additional layer of understanding to the scene. But, as Stephen King famously said, “The road to hell is paved with adverbs.” Lazy writers tend to use adverbs to modify a weak verb instead of searching for a stronger verb. Look at these examples:

Weak verb:	James ran to school.
Weak verb + adverb:	James ran quickly to school.
Strong verb:	James sprinted to school.
Weak verb:	Nicola spoke to her daughter.
Weak verb + adverb:	Nicola spoke quietly to her daughter.
Strong verb:	Nicola whispered to her daughter.
Weak verb:	Scarlett looked at Stan.
Weak verb + adverb:	Scarlett looked angrily at Stan.
Strong verb:	Scarlett glared at Stan.

In all three examples the strong verb paints a much more nuanced and compelling picture of the action.

We certainly don’t suggest that you remove ALL adverbs; sometimes they will be exactly right for what you are trying to get across. But adverbs tend to prop up weak verbs and so you should always ask yourself “Is there a stronger verb I can use here instead?”

You can highlight all the adverbs in your writing by running the **Style Report** in ProWritingAid.

QUICK TRICK

BRAINSTORM FOR STRENGTH

If you can’t think of the right strong verb by looking at your weak verb in context, write it alone in the middle of a blank page and add as many variations as possible. It doesn’t matter if they are only tangentially related. Write as many as you can think of and check back with your sentence. If there’s a perfect fit, go for it! If not, consult a thesaurus: you now have lots of options to input rather than just the original weak verb.

TIP #2

AVOID STICKY SENTENCES

Nobody likes it when gum gets stuck to their shoe. Likewise, nobody likes too many sticky sentences in writing.

A sticky sentence is one that is full of glue words. Glue words are used to make the essential pieces of the sentence stick together. They don't carry much meaning in and of themselves, yet are still necessary to create a coherent sentence.

Working words, on the other hand, carry the load of most sentences. Working words convey meaning to the reader and contain essential information.

Every sentence has (and needs) glue words. But when you get too many in a sentence, the sentence becomes sticky. In practical terms, that means it's difficult to read.

You should aim to have less than 40% glue words in your sentences. Some sentences might go over that mark, but that should only happen rarely and for a good reason.

Check out this example:

- **STICKY:** I went over to my friend's house after school and then we just played basketball for a really long time.

Glue index: 61.9%

- **REWRITE:** After school, I headed to my friend's house and we played basketball all afternoon.

Glue index: 33.3%

Our app is advanced enough to identify sticky sentences in your writing using the Sticky Sentences Report. It is not, however, advanced enough to rewrite them for you, and in all honesty, it probably never will be.

That's a good thing! It's up to us writers to rework our sentences to be the best they can be.

A sticky sentence here and there is usually fine, especially if there's no other way to phrase your thought. A whole book full of them is another story.

Use your judgment. You're the writer, so you have the final say. If you love your sentence despite its stickiness, keep it. If you side with our app and decide it needs revision, revise it.

GLUE WORDS

The most common words in English, including, but not limited to:

in	of	think	is
on	to	some	this
the	there	new	from
was	will	make	with
for	be	much	have
that	what	every	an
said	get	should	by
a	go	just	it
if	like	and	asked

TIP #3

DON'T HIDE YOUR VERBS, REJOICE IN THEM!

Verbs are the engine of our writing. They excite, engage and thrust it forward. Many novice writers end up accidentally hiding their verbs. This process (called nominalization) turns verbs into nouns and adds a weak verb in their place. For example:

- We will make an announcement of the winner on Friday
verb noun
- We will announce the winner on Friday
verb

The first sentence uses a weak verb (make) and hides a strong verb (announce) as a noun (announcement). The second sentence is shorter, clearer and stronger. It relies less on those extraneous glue words that we mentioned in Tip #2.

Hidden verbs are particularly common in business writing when writers are trying to use an “official” voice:

- analyzed ➔ undertook an analysis
- discussed ➔ held a discussion
- decided ➔ made a decision
- reviewed ➔ carried out a review
- explained ➔ gave an explanation

Highlight all the hidden verbs in your writing by running the ProWritingAid **Style Report** and reveal your strong verbs in all their glory.

QUICK TRICK

FIND YOUR VERBS

To search out your hidden verbs, watch out for words with the following endings:

- ance** (assistance), -**edge** (knowledge),
- ery** (discovery), -**ity** (accountability), -**ment** (government),
- sion** (expansion), -**tion** (attention).

And, keep your eye out for the following linking verbs that are often followed by a hidden verb: **Make, give, achieve, have, reach, take** and **undertake**.

“We are not nouns, we are verbs. I am not a thing - an actor, a writer - I am a person who does things - I write, I act - and I never know what I’m going to do next. I think you can be imprisoned if you think of yourself as a noun.”

Stephen Fry

TIP #4

FAVOR ACTIVE VERBS

This is one of those rules passed down by generations of writers: sentences written in the active voice tend to be more engaging for the reader. Using the active voice instead of the passive voice is one of the best things you can do to improve your writing.

In an active sentence, the subject is at the start of the sentence and the ordering is subject - verb - object. For example:

- Jane watched the video.
subject verb noun

In the passive sentence, the subject is relegated to the end of the sentence and the ordering is object - verb - subject:

- The video was watched by Jane.
noun verb subject

Like many of these rules, this does not mean that you must remove every occurrence – sometimes it works – but more often than not, you should rearrange your passive sentence to make it active, and therefore more effective. Consider:

- The doorbell was rung by the mailman to deliver the package.
noun verb subject
- The mailman rang the doorbell to deliver the package.
subject verb noun

The first sentence is written in passive voice, which means the person or thing doing the action (the mailman) follows the action (ringing the doorbell). Using the active voice turns the sentence around and puts the subject first. This makes the meaning clearer and the sentence shorter.

Sometimes in the passive voice the subject is completely omitted:

- The ball was thrown over the fence.
noun verb
- Action was taken against the three trespassers.
noun verb
- Katy was kissed at prom.
noun verb

By whom? For the sake of clarity, it is usually better to tie your action to the person or thing that is doing the action. Otherwise your reader is left having to draw their own conclusions.

BEWARE!

The passive voice can sometimes be sneaky and hide within a reduced sentence or get broken up by a modifier. Don't let them slip in this way:

- The ball, thrown over the fence, was later found.

is a reduction of:

- The ball (that was) thrown over the fence, was later found.
noun passive verb split passive verb

Turn it into the active voice:

- Daniel threw the ball over the fence. Caroline found it again.
subject verb noun subject verb noun

ProWritingAid's **Style Report** will highlight all the passive verbs in your text so you can find them and turn them into active verbs.

TIP #5

VARY YOUR SENTENCE LENGTH

Varied sentence length is an important feature of good writing. The late Gary Provost illustrated it best:

This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It's like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety.

Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals – sounds that say listen to this, it is important.

So write with a combination of short, medium, and long sentences. Create a sound that pleases the reader's ear. Don't just write words. Write music.

To maintain your readers' interest, use a variety of sentence lengths: some short and punchy, others long and flowing.

There are two easy ways to check your sentence length variety. Choose the method that works best for you.

1. CHECK OUT YOUR STATS

ProWritingAid counts every word in every sentence of your selected text, and then it gives you two scores:

a) Average Sentence Length

The average sentence length for most published writers is between 11 and 18 words. If your average is above 18, then your writing might be too verbose or complicated. If your average is below 11, your writing will likely feel choppy. Check your score and then rework your text if you need to.

b) Sentence Variety Score

The sentence variety is calculated using a concept called standard deviation. This is a mathematical measure of variety from the average. The higher the standard deviation, the more your sentence lengths vary within the document.

● Sentence variety 9.4 target over 3
Sentences by Word Count



● 8 long sentences found
Individual Sentence Lengths



2. GRAPH YOUR SENTENCES

Create a visual representation of your work so you can easily scan to find areas that need more variety.

Whichever method works best for you, you will be amazed at how much better your writing sounds when you use good sentence variety. As Gary Provost said, "Don't just write words. Write music."

Use ProWritingAid's **Sentence Length Check** to find your stats or create a graph of your sentences.

TIP #6

DON'T OVERUSE OVERUSED WORDS

An overused word or sentence construction is one that has the potential to weaken your writing. Examples of overused words include words that are too wishy-washy (like “could” or “might”), intensifiers (like “very” or “really”), and words that tell rather than show (like “feel” or “believe”).

These words cheapen your work and go against the principles of good writing. For example, consider the following two sentences:

- *Mary was really mad at her parents.*
- *Mary raged at her parents.*

While both sentences are technically correct, the second sentence contains more vivid language showing how Mary felt, rather than telling how she felt.

At their core, overused words are those that make your writing less powerful, even though they are grammatically correct. The ProWritingAid Overused Words report identifies those types of words in your writing so you can choose to remove them and strengthen your work.

It's important to note that the words we flag in the Overused Words report are subjective: they are not technically wrong. However, if used too frequently, they can weaken your writing.

Here are the types of words we flag in this report:

1. WISHY-WASHY WORDS

Words like “could”, “might”, and “maybe” are indefinite in their meaning. If your writing is peppered with these hedging words, it will feel unconvincing.

2. TELLING WORDS

Words like “knew”, “felt”, and “saw” tend to be indicative of “telling” rather than “showing”.

Look at the difference:

- *John knew that Jason was lying.*
- *Jason avoided John's eyes as he stammered, “I don't know where it is.”*

If you use too many “telling” words, your writing will be less evocative.

3. INTENSIFIERS

Intensifiers like “very”, “so”, and “really” add little to your reader's understanding. Writers use them when they are trying to give strength to a dull word.

Instead, replace your weak words with something strong enough that you don't need the “very”. A small rewrite can make a big difference to the impact of your words:

- *She was very pretty.*
- *She was stunning.*

TIP #7

CLICHÉS ARE BORING AND REDUNDANCIES ARE ANNOYING

CLICHÉS

“Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.”

George Orwell

Whenever you use a cliché, you are knowingly writing something unoriginal. Clichés are what you write when you don't have the energy or inspiration to think of something new to say.

Writers often use clichés when they are working on their first draft because thinking up original wording takes time and can interrupt creative flow. That's fine. But, when you go back to edit, be creative and brainstorm for fresh ideas. A new analogy or metaphor will make much more of an impression on your readers than a dusty old cliché. A good writer may create and reject over a dozen images before finding the right one, so don't worry if it takes you a while.

QUICK TRICK

USE YOUR OWN FEELINGS TO BRAINSTORM

If you're trying to replace "she was happy as a lark", think of situations in which you are happy and magnify them. For instance, maybe you have a penchant for chocolate, which might lead to *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which might lead you to "she felt as if she'd just found Willy Wonka's golden ticket".

REDUNDANCIES

Every word in your writing should be there for a reason. Redundant expressions make writing longer, not better. Look at these four examples:

- She peered through the hollow tube.
- He stepped out on the frozen ice.
- She followed her natural instinct.
- His writing was peppered with overused clichés.

In all four cases, the penultimate word is superfluous.

Redundancies can happen across a sentence, too:

- The problems first began when Gary lost his job.

The word *began* means "the first occurrence", so the word *first* is redundant.

- Sam, Tom and Susie gathered together around the fire.

The word *gathered* means "to come together", so the word *together* is redundant.

- He reversed the car back down the driveway.

As opposed to reversing it *forward*? Drop the word *back* because it's redundant.

Redundancies add quantity, not quality. Eliminate the clutter.

Use ProWritingAid's **Cliché and Redundancy Check** to highlight those that have crept into your writing.

TIP #8

DON'T REPEAT YOURSELF

Repeating a word or phrase happens to the best of us, especially if you're writing an article and using a specific vocabulary for your topic. You won't even notice you've used the same word several times in the span of one paragraph because it's foremost in your mind. But those repeats can set off an echo in the reader's mind – that subconscious feeling of “Didn't he just say that?” It can be irritating to read and, worse, it can detract from what you are trying to say. The more uncommon a word or phrase, the more likely it is to echo, even pages apart.

Consider the following text:

- **At your next get-together, cook together as a family and enjoy the benefits of creating a meal together and the bond you'll create.**

It is easy as the reader to point out how many times “together” is used in the above example, but as the writer, you know what you meant to express and so the emphasis sounds natural to you.

Although it happens all the time, it can be difficult for you, as the writer, to spot when you re-read it. When you are editing you usually go over the same piece several times and so you become impervious to that echo feeling. And when you are looking at a sentence on its own and making amendments, you can sometimes input a word that is just right for that sentence, forgetting that you also used it in the one before or after.

ProWritingAid's **Repeats Check** highlights words and phrases repeated within a few paragraphs so you can easily track down unintended repetition and replace it with a more diverse vocabulary.

QUICK TRICK

SOMETIMES PURPOSEFUL REPETITION MAKES THE BEST POETRY

Use your own best judgment about repeating a word or two in your text. Dickens' opening lines of *A Tale of Two Cities* is a great example of effective repetition:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.

TIP #9

USE MORE TRANSITIONS

Imagine a road with no street signs. How would you follow the right route if you didn't have a sign showing you which way to go?

Transition words are the road signs in writing. And great transitions help your reader follow your train of thought without becoming bogged down trying to discern your meaning. Words and phrases like “similarly”, “nevertheless”, “in order to”, “likewise,” or “as a result” show the relationships between your ideas and can help illustrate agreement, contrast or show cause and effect:

- Mark avoided the campus dining hall where his ex-friends hung out. He didn't like its food.
- Mark avoided the campus dining hall where his ex-friends hung out. Equally important, he didn't like its food.

In the second example, you understand that the two thoughts are both important and related. Mark is not just avoiding the dining hall because he doesn't like the food; he is also avoiding the people who used to be his friends.

- Kate thought her mother was over-reacting to her announcement. She waited two days after the first phone call to visit.
- Kate thought her mother was over-reacting to her announcement. Because of this, she waited two days after the first phone call to visit.

The use of “Because of this” in the second sentence makes clear to the reader that the gap in time between the call and the visit was a direct result of the over-reaction.

- The boy kicked the ball into the street. A speeding car came around the corner.
- The boy kicked the ball into the street. At the same moment, a speeding car came around the corner.

Now we see the action in a wider lens: the ball goes into the street just as a car comes careening around the corner. The first illustration is short and choppy. It doesn't flow well. The second sentence with a transition leads you smoothly between two related, but different thoughts.

The ProWritingAid **Transitions Report** will scan your writing and give you a “transitions score”, which is based on the percentage of sentences that contain a transition. We recommend that you aim for a score of 25% or higher, which means that you use at least one transition word or phrase every four sentences.

TIP #10

“DE-TAG YOUR DIALOGUE!” THE EDITOR SHOUTED ANGRILY

Dialogue tags are the words that refer dialogue to a specific character. The two most common examples are “said” and “asked”.

- “I’m not going!” said Charlie.

They are essential in writing, particularly in scenes that include several characters, because they help the reader follow the conversation. Novice writers, however, have an annoying tendency to use more flowery dialogue tags and pepper them with adverbs.

- “I’m not going!” said Charlie angrily.
tag adverb

- “I’m not going!” shouted Charlie.
tag

- “I’m not going!” roared Charlie furiously.
tag adverb

More than anything, tags like these tend to distract the reader. Ideally, your dialogue tags should be invisible within your writing, just signposts that point out who is speaking. The character’s actions or the dialogue itself should be carrying the emotion. Don’t depend on an adverb to make your reader feel something.

Where possible, try to omit dialogue tags altogether. Instead, use description and action to point out your speaker and build your scene.

- **Charlie slammed his fist on the table. “I’m not going and that’s final.”**

In this example, Charlie’s anger was shown, not told. The reader knows that he is the one speaking – even without a tag – and his fist shows that he is angry instead of an adverb. It gives much stronger sense of the scene.

“If the dialogue is so weak that the writer has to re-explain what emotions or motivations are being conveyed, there may be more serious problems lurking.”

Joe Moore, author of *The Cotten Stone Mystery Series*

Use the ProWritingAid **Dialogue Tags Check** so that you can find a better way to demonstrate emotion.

TIP #11

CHOP AWAY DEADWOOD

If you take one key message from ProWritingAid, it's that when it comes to writing, less is more. Make every word count. If it doesn't move your plot forward or express an essential idea, cut it!

Writers often use deadwood phrases: the wordy ways of saying simple things. Why write "has the ability to" when you can write "can"? You're just using more words to say the same thing, which actually makes your writing much less readable. Look through your writing for a simpler way of saying the same thing.

I believe more in
the scissors than
I do in the pencil.

Truman Capote

Some other examples include:

at this point in time ➡ now

due to the fact that ➡ because

in order to ➡ to

in the event that ➡ if

prior to the start of ➡ before

has been found to be ➡ is

a sufficient amount of ➡ enough

at such time as ➡ when

for the reason that ➡ because

in close proximity to ➡ near

it is our opinion that ➡ we think

serves the function of being ➡ is

in the near future ➡ soon

Use the **Diction Check** in ProWritingAid to highlight deadwood words or phrases and replace them with succinct language.

TIP #12

BEWARE OF PURPLE PROSE

Purple Prose is writing that is so flowery and pretentious that it ruins the flow of your writing by drawing excessive attention to itself. It feels as if the author is saying “Look how clever I am with my enormous vocabulary and intricate description.”

It is characterized by the use of overly complicated words (why use *pachyderm* when you can just say *elephant?*), excessive adverbs (we’ve mentioned their evils before), and an unnecessary amount of adjectives.

- *Discombobulated, Anna lay languidly on her aquamarine Charmuese bedspread and speculated forlornly about the myriad of alternatives available to her.*
- *Confused, Anna lay in her room, wondering what she should do next.*

See? You can tell that I had to use my thesaurus to write that first one. It’s unnatural and awkward, and the flowery words distract from the meaning. The second option is clean and clear. Authors sometimes end up writing “Purple Passages” when they have run out of places to go with their narrative. Because they are having trouble moving their plot or argument forward, they overcompensate by filling the pages with wordy description. It is both frustrating and dull for the reader to wade through.

If you want to show you’re clever, do so by maintaining the flow of your writing, cutting the nonessentials and keeping the reader’s attention until the end.

Searching for Purple Prose is slightly more complicated as it can manifest in many different ways. Try running ProWritingAid’s **Diction Check** to find overly complicated phrases. The **Style Check** can also be useful in tracking down passages that are overly purple.

WHYPURPLE?

The term Purple Prose was coined by the poet Horace. He found this pretentious kind of writing unbearable and compared it to poor people who sewed patches of purple onto their clothing because purple was associated with wealth. The patch was not a signifier of true wealth, just as Purple Prose is not a signifier of true great writing.

TIP #13

WATCH YOUR PRONOUNS

When you are writing in creative mode, you often rely on pronouns to keep your narrative moving: “He did this,” “She did that,” “They ran there,” “I found out.” That’s fine. It’s more important to keep your writing momentum up than it is to get every sentence just right.

When you go back and edit, however, you should check your pronoun percentage. Ideally it should fall somewhere between 4% and 15%. Any more than this and your writing can feel dull. This is especially so with initial pronouns – those at the start of the sentence. Your initial pronoun percentage should be under 30%.

- John turned the corner and saw Doris marching down the road toward his house. She looked like she was angry. He wondered what it was that he had done this time. He tried to remember if he had cut his lawn and turned off his sprinkler. He sometimes cut through his back yard just to avoid running into her.

Pronoun percentage 17.8%. Initial pronoun percentage 80%

- John turned the corner and saw Doris marching down the road toward his house. What had he done to make her angry this time? She loved being the first to point out his gardening lapses. Had he cut the lawn? Had the sprinkler been left on? Sometimes he cut through the back yard just to avoid running into her.

Pronoun percentage 13.6%. Initial pronoun percentage 17.7%

Use ProWritingAid’s **Pronoun Check** to find those areas in your text that would benefit from a reduction in pronouns.

PRONOUN CHART

	SUBJECT PRONOUNS	OBJECT PRONOUNS	POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVES	POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS	REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS
1st person	I	me	my	mine	myself
2nd person	you	you	your	yours	yourself
3rd person (male)	he	him	his	his	himself
3rd person (female)	she	her	her	hers	herself
3rd person	it	it	its	n/a	itself
1st person (plural)	we	us	our	ours	ourselves
2nd person (plural)	you	you	your	yours	yourselves
3rd person (plural)	they	them	their	theirs	themselves

TIP #14

USE ALL FIVE OF YOUR SENSES

It's important to use all five senses in your writing. Every writer has a tendency to favor one or two of their senses over the others, and this affects the way that he or she experiences the world, processes information and makes memories. This means that we tend to describe characters, settings or actions using words related to our own favored senses. Writing that skews too far toward one sense over the others will resonate more with readers who favor the same sense and less so with those who do not.

The term "NLP predicate" refers to those words (primarily verbs, adverbs and adjectives) associated with the specific senses. There are thousands of words associated with each but some examples are included, right:

VISUAL PREDICATES	KINAESTHETIC PREDICATES	AUDITORY PREDICATES
see view clear illuminate showed appeared	felt grasp hard rough shape turn over	heard silence listens resonates tunes deaf
OLFACTORY PREDICATES	GUSTATORY PREDICATES	AUDITORY DIGITAL PREDICATES
smell fragrant stench sniff odorous stank	tasted bitter sour flavor ate acerbic	think decide motivate consider understand know

TIP #14 CONTINUED

USE ALL FIVE OF YOUR SENSES

HOW TO EXPERIENCE AN EXPLOSION

We created the following example for a guest post on DIY Author in 2015. Imagine a fictional situation that can be described using different predicates to resonate with different senses.

- The blast from the explosion was blinding. Jane searched the sky and saw a plume of smoke rising from her office.
- The heat from the explosion hit Jane like a bus. Her legs felt riddled with bullets as she struggled along the rough brick wall toward her office.
- The explosion was deafening. Sirens immediately began to wail as Jane struggled to her feet, her ears drumming like machine gun fire.
- The explosion filled the street with an acrid cloud of noxious smoke. Jane choked on the fumes as she pulled her sweater up over her burning nostrils.
- The explosion filled the street with an acidic cloud of toxic smoke. With the taste of charcoal burning her tongue, Jane struggled toward her office.
- The explosion came from behind and Jane knew immediately that it was her office. She thought of the files on her desk and knew that she needed to go back.

Now check out this example where more than one sense is used together:

- The heat from the explosion hit Jane like a bus. Sirens began to wail and a plume of smoke rose from her office. With the taste of charcoal burning her tongue and her ears drumming like machine gun fire, Jane thought of the files on her desk and knew that she needed to go back.

The reader experiences the explosion in a much more vivid way when several of her senses are ignited.

When you are writing for a broad audience, you should try to use words associated with all of the senses. It will help emotionally engage with the widest range of people.

TIP #15

ALWAYS DELETE WORDS THAT YOU MISSPELL AND TYPE THEM AGAIN

“I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it.”

Pablo Picasso

This is a great tip for improving your spelling. In today's world of spellcheckers it's easy to go on misspelling words forever as you just correct them with your mouse. We recommend spending a bit of time upfront improving your spelling to save time in the future. Every time you misspell a word, delete the whole word and re-type it again, paying attention to the spelling.

We learn best if we are rewarded for getting something right, or punished for getting it wrong. Having to re-type a word is a small, annoying punishment for getting it wrong. You'll be amazed how quickly your brain learns the right spelling.

When you run the **Grammar Check** in the free version of ProWritingAid, your spelling mistakes are presented to you in a read-only format. This is good because it forces you to go back and correct the error in your document. The premium version allows you to edit as you go along. You can correct errors by choosing from a drop down menu (online) or double-clicking (add-in). This saves time in the short term and is great when you have a lot of text to get through, but we still recommend that if you see a word that you know you have trouble with, take the time to retype it. It will help stop you from making the same error again in the future.

Which of these commonly misspelled words do you get wrong? These examples from Oxforddictionaries.com illustrate some of the most common mistakes:

CORRECT SPELLING	SPELLING ADVICE	COMMON MISSPELLING
accommodate, accommodation	two cs , two ms	accomodate, accomodation
achieve	i before e	acheive
across	one c	accross
aggressive, aggression	two gs	agressive, agression
apparently	-ent not -ant	apparrantly
appearance	ends with -ance	appearence
argument	no e after the u	arguement
assassination	two double s 's	assasination
basically	ends with -ally	basicly
beginning	double n before the -ing	begining
calendar	-ar not -er	calender
Caribbean	one r , two bs	Carribbean
cemetery	ends with -ery	cemetary
chauffeur	ends with -eur	chauffer
colleague	-ea- in the middle	collegue
committee	double m , double t , double e	commitee
completely	ends with -ely	completly
conscious	-sc- in the middle	concius
definitely	-ite- not -ate-	definatly

TIP #15 CONTINUED

ALWAYS DELETE WORDS THAT YOU MISSPELL AND TYPE THEM AGAIN

CORRECT SPELLING	SPELLING ADVICE	COMMON MISSPELLING
disappoint	one s , two ps	dissappoint
ecstasy	ends with -sy	ecstacy
embarrass	two rs , two s's	embarass
existence	ends with -ence	existance
Fahrenheit	begins with Fahr-	Farenheit
fluorescent	begins with fluor-	florescent
foreign	e before i	foriegn
foreseeable	begins with fore-	forseeable
gist	begins with g-	jist
glamorous	-mor- in the middle	glamourous
harass, harassment	one r , two s's	harrass, harrassment
idiosyncrasy	ends with -asy	idiosyncracy
immediately	ends with -ely	immediatly
incidentally	ends with -ally	incidently
independent	ends with -ent	independant
irresistible	ends with -ible	irresistable
liaise, liaison	remember the second i : liais-	liase, liason
millennium, millennia	double l , double n	millenium, millenia
necessary	one c , two s's	necessary
noticeable	remember the middle e	noticable
occasion	two cs , one s	ocassion, occassion
occurred, occurring	two cs , two rs	ocured, occuring
occurrence	two cs , two rs , -ence not -ance	occurance, occurence

CORRECT SPELLING	SPELLING ADVICE	COMMON MISSPELLING
persistent	ends with -ent	persistant
politician	ends with -cian	politican
possession	two s's in the middle and two at the end	posession
preferred, preferring	two rs	prefered, preferring
publicly	ends with -cly	publically
receive	e before i	recieve
referred, referring	two rs	referred, referring
religious	ends with -gious	religous
resistance	ends with -ance	resistence
separate	-par- in the middle	seperate
siege	i before e	seige
successful	two cs , two s's	succesful
supersede	ends with -sede	supercede
tattoo	two ts , two os	tatoo
tendency	ends with -ency	tendancy
therefore	ends with -fore	therefor
threshold	one h in the middle	threshhold
tongue	begins with ton- , ends with -gue	tounge
truly	no e	truely
unforeseen	remember the e after the r	unforseen
unfortunately	ends with -ely	unfortunatly
wherever	one e in the middle	wherever

TIP #16

CHECK YOUR PACE

“In many cases when a reader puts a story aside because it ‘got boring,’ the boredom arose because the writer grew enchanted with his powers of description and lost sight of his priority, which is to keep the ball rolling.”

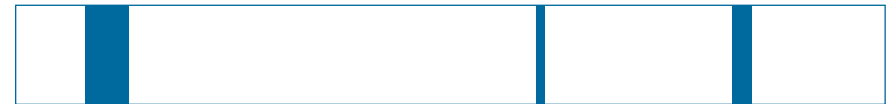
Stephen King

Pacing refers to the speed at which a story is told and how quickly the reader is moved through events. Good writing contains faster-paced sections, such as dialogue and character action, as well as slower-paced sections, such as introspection and backstory.

A book that is entirely composed of car chases without taking the time to make you care about the character being chased just won't be effective at bringing readers into the story. Likewise, a story that has four chapters in a row dedicated to your main character's Zen contemplation may need a bit of action to keep readers interested. Differently paced sections should complement each other, allowing the reader to move with you through the narrative.

ProWritingAid's **Pacing Check** finds those areas in your writing that are paced more slowly so that you can spread them out. Too many slower paced paragraphs in a row and your reader's attention may wane.

PACING VISUALIZATION



Any areas shown in white are areas of slower pacing. Try to add some more action to areas that contains lots of white.

QUICK TIP

FIND THE RIGHT PACE FOR YOUR STORY

Different stories will allow for different paces. Readers will expect more slowly paced passages in a dense historical drama than in a modern thriller.

TIP #17

STRENGTHEN YOUR METAPHORS

A strong metaphor has an unparalleled ability to convey your meaning. We understand new things by relating them to things that we already know.

Writers often use events from their own lives that parallel what they are trying to explain. In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare wrote “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players.” Of course, he didn’t literally mean that the planet is a giant stage. He used his own understanding of theatre to create a metaphor that helps us understand a larger point about human nature. It is much more effective than if he had just written “People undertake many different roles throughout their lives and sometimes pretend to be something other than their true selves.” The metaphor gets across a nuanced insight because readers and audience members are able to take everything that they know about stage performances and apply it to this concept. As such, there is a great deal of depth already embedded in their understanding.

Robert Frost’s poem *The Road Not Taken* (see box) is another brilliant metaphor. Frost never mentions anything other than the physical elements of a road, yet the reader understands that his point is about choosing the right option in life, even if it is difficult or unpopular. Similarly, the parables in the Bible are extended metaphors aimed at teaching a moral lesson. Some writers even use metaphor as the basis for a whole book. This type of extended metaphor is known as an allegory. *Animal Farm* by George Orwell is an allegory of the events leading to the Russian revolution, and was written as a critique of Stalin.

Finding the right metaphor is like dating: you may have to reject many before you find the right one, and when you find it, you’ll know it’s the perfect match.

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN BY ROBERT FROST

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

TIP #18

READ YOUR WORK ALOUD

The human brain is always trying to be helpful by filling in missing information. Most of the time, that's great. It's how animation works. Animators just need to show you a succession of images, and your brain links them all together and provides the missing information that turns them into a movie.

The same thing happens when you are reading, especially if it's your own writing. I'm sure you have all carefully proofed a sentence and still missed an obvious typo. That's because your brain guesses what's supposed to be there and so replaces it in your head with the correct word or spelling. This was circulating on the internet a while back:

I cdn'uolt blveiee taht I cluod aulacly uesdnatnrd waht I was rdanieg: the phaonmneel pweor of the hmuan mnid. Aoccdrnig to a rseearch taem at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttair in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Scuh a cdonition is arppoiatrely cllaed typoglycemia.

Isn't your brain clever to make sense of all that nonsense? Yes, but, this very same skill is what makes self-editing so much more difficult. Your brain sees what you meant to say, rather than what you wrote.

When you are reading aloud, however, it's much harder to skip over errors. You are more likely to hear what is actually on the page rather than what you meant to write.

QUICK TRICKS

CHANGE YOUR FONT

Before you read your writing aloud it is a good idea to change the text to an unfamiliar font. Your brain needs to work that extra bit harder to read each word, so you are more likely to catch those errors.

USE TEXT TO SPEECH SOFTWARE

You could also try listening to your text by inputting it into a Text to Speech app like Ivona. Hearing your words read aloud, even if it's by a computer-generated voice, is a great way to catch errors.

TIP #19

ALWAYS GET SOMEONE ELSE TO READ YOUR WORK

Even the most popular authors in the world have people in their lives that read their work and give them feedback. It may be their husband, best friend or a professional editor (or all of those people at different points in their writing process) but they find the person they trust to give them that essential feedback to improve their writing.

Use an editing tool and some of the techniques listed here to get your writing as close to perfect as you can manage. Ideally 80% of your technical editing should be done by you so that your beta reader or editor can focus on the meat of your writing. They can help you develop your strengths as a writer and point out areas that need further development.

“At its foundation the role of the editor is a blend of meddler and midwife”

Nell Frizzell, journalist

There are huge numbers of online writing communities that help writers find readers for their work. “Beta readers” are non-professionals who love reading and giving feedback and there are millions of them around the world. Try websites like Scribophile or Creative Critique to find an online beta reader, or use Google to find local writers’ groups.

QUICK TRICK

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

To avoid generic feedback like “I liked it” or “it was good”, ask your reader specific questions. For articles and blog posts, ask a friend or colleague:

- 1 Did it read smoothly from top to bottom, or were there areas that felt rough or out of place?
- 2 Were there any sentences that you had to read twice to get the meaning?
- 3 Were there words that you were unfamiliar with?
- 4 Was the argument cohesive?
- 5 Are there elements that should be fleshed out further?
- 6 Is the tone right for the target audience?

For fiction writing, here are some questions that you might find helpful:

- 1 Did the beginning of the story capture your interest right away?
- 2 Did you find the main character relatable? Did you care what happened to him or her?
- 3 What was your favorite scene?
- 4 What sections did you find boring?
- 5 Were there points in the story that didn’t make sense or that you found frustrating?
- 6 Did you feel compelled to keep reading? Why or why not?
- 7 Did you ever get confused about who was who?
- 8 Were there any sections that you felt got bogged down with too much backstory, dialogue, or description? Or that needed more?

TIP #20

STOP TINKERING AND GET IT OUT THERE

“Art is never finished,
only abandoned.”

Leonardo da Vinci

Writing is not like doing a mathematics equation. It's never perfect. It's never solved. There is never a moment when you think “Yep, every word in this manuscript now adds up completely to form the perfect story.” The tricky part is knowing when to stop.

We have stressed throughout this document that editing is essential. Writers should expect to spend almost as much time editing as they do writing. Every paragraph should be reassessed, revised or even rewritten at least a couple of times. No one writes so well on their first draft that they can't think of ways to express some of their ideas in a better way. It is an essential process if your writing is going appear polished and professional to readers and potential publishers.

BUT...

...too many writers tinker away at their manuscript far past the moment when they should have sent it off to prospective publishers and agents. At some point you will reach the stage where you are no longer improving the piece, just making it different. In your final edit (which may be your 3rd, 9th or 21st, depending on how long it takes you to get there), you should be able to read each paragraph and not be able to come up with any substantive differences that you are confident will improve on your ideas or how they are communicated. You can always waffle over decisions like whether “division” or “separation” is best, or whether “has been” or “went” makes the most sense in this context. But you will no longer be rewriting sentences entirely or moving paragraphs around.

At the end of that edit, you are probably ready to let it go. Stop focusing on making the book, and start focusing on getting it out into the world.

And that, my author friends, is a whole other e-book!

Good luck and happy editing!

ABOUT PROWRITINGAID

ProWritingAid analyzes your writing and highlights potential improvements. Each report focuses on a particular area of your writing.

Some reports will provide quick fixes that will allow you to polish up a short piece of writing. Other reports will go in depth and reveal areas where you can do more to improve your writing style.

While ProWritingAid is not going to do your job for you, it will make your job easier. You'll improve your writing style as you use the reports because you'll become more aware of the mistakes that you make, just like having a real-life writing coach guiding you. Not every suggestion will work for every writer, so you'll have to use your own judgement.

THE WRITING STYLE REPORT

The Writing Style Report is one of the most popular and comprehensive reports that ProWritingAid offers. We all know that there is a lot more to good writing than just correct grammar, and these suggestions are based on the same ideas you would learn in a university writing course.

The Style Report highlights several areas of writing that should be revised to improve readability, including: passive and hidden verbs, over-reliance on adverbs, repeated sentence starts, emotional tells and much more. These suggestions are the same as a professional copy-editor would give you (in fact many of them use ProWritingAid). If you are going to send your writing to a copy-editor then, by fixing all these mistakes upfront, your editor will be able to focus on the more important aspects of your work, such as tone of voice. You'll get a more polished piece of writing as a reward.

THE GRAMMAR REPORT

The Grammar Report is like Microsoft Word's grammar checker but with super powers. We use the latest artificial-intelligence algorithms to catch all those issues that Word's grammar checker misses. What's more, our team of copy-editors have input thousands of specific checks that they have come across in their years of editing. For example, they noticed that many writers write "adverse" when they actually mean "averse", so when this comes up, the software will offer a short explanation about how the two words are different. This additional understanding means you can make sure you select the correct word not just this time, but every time. You'll eliminate all the embarrassing errors from your text and learn not to make them in the future.

THE OVERUSED WORDS REPORT

Writers should be wary of many words and phrases in the English language that are indicative of poor writing style. Intensifiers like "very", for example, actually weaken your writing, or hesitant words like "just" or "maybe" make your writing feel unconvincing. Words like these are fine in moderation, but when overused can undermine your ideas. In this report, we'll flag the problematic words and phrases that are commonly overused by writers, and help you to eliminate them. As you work through them, you will begin to recognize and avoid using them in the first place.

THE CLICHÉS AND REDUNDANCIES REPORT

Clichés are the crutch of the lazy writer! Don't rely on someone else's dusty old imagery. Brainstorm for innovative new ways to express your ideas. Fresh metaphors will leave a much stronger impression on your reader.

Never use two words when one will do the job. Redundant wording adds quantity to your writing, but not quality. Every word in your writing should be there for a reason. This report helps you eliminate the clutter.

THE STICKY SENTENCE REPORT

Sticky sentences wobble around without getting to the point. They are hard to follow, and should be rewritten to increase clarity.

Every sentence contains some words that don't have any actual meaning; they just hold your sentence together: *and, in, the, of,* etc. These glue words are empty spaces in your writing that your writer needs to get through to reach your meaning. Statistics show that published texts have a low percentage of glue words, and so should your writing.

THE READABILITY REPORT

Being a great writer is not about using fancy words – it's about communicating meaning to your readers. If they have to look up words or decipher your language in any way, they will be distracted from your ideas. This report uses the top readability tools out there, including the popular Flesch Reading Ease Score, to analyze your writing and highlight those sentences that will be hard for your reader to understand.

THE REPEATS CHECK

Writers often mistakenly use the same word several times in the span of one paragraph because it's foremost in their mind. But those repeats can set off an echo in the reader's mind – that subconscious feeling of "Didn't he just say that?" Too much of the same word or phrase can be irritating to read and, worse, it can detract from what you are trying to say. This report highlights repeated words and phrases in your document so you can use a more diverse vocabulary.

THE SENTENCE LENGTH REPORT

Writing that uses varying sentence lengths keeps the reader's brain engaged. Some should be short and punchy, others should be long and flowing. Sentence variety adds an element of music to your writing. ProWritingAid creates a visual representation of your sentence lengths so you can pick out areas where you should add more variety. Too many long sentences may result in a monotonous text, or too

many short sentences may result in a choppy text. You can see at a glance where adding more short, medium or long sentences will round out the piece.

THE PRONOUN REPORT

Inexperienced writers often rely on pronouns to keep the narrative moving: "He did this", "She did that", "They ran there", "I found out." It's dull. On average, published writing contains only 4-15% pronouns. If your writing contains a higher percentage than that, then you need to replace your pronoun-heavy passages with more dynamic wording.

THE TRANSITION REPORT

Transition words are the road signs in writing – they help your reader move smoothly between ideas. Transitions like "similarly", "nevertheless", "in order to", or "as a result" help you show your readers how separate points go together to support your larger idea. They illustrate agreement, contrast or show cause and effect. One in every four sentences (25%) should contain a transition. If your transition score is less than 25%, you should consider adding more road signs.

THE CONSISTENCY CHECK

Consistency is essential in writing. It makes it feel professional and polished. The Consistency Check highlights inconsistency of spelling, hyphenation, capitalization, and punctuation. It also checks to make sure that you are consistently writing in either American English or British English.

THE PACING CHECK

Great fiction always contains fast-paced sections, such as dialogue and character action, as well as slow-paced sections, such as introspection and backstory. Both are essential to create a strong narrative and believable characters, but you never want your readers to feel bored or bogged down by too many long, slow passages. Use ProWritingAid to monitor your slow-paced sections to make sure your readers never lose interest.

THE DIALOGUE TAGS CHECK

Most dialogue tags, aside from "said" and "asked" break that cardinal rule of writing: show don't tell. If you write "Jane exclaimed" after her dialogue, you are depending on a word to get Jane's emotion across. Instead, show it to your reader with her actions. Describe how Jane's

eyes bulge with shock. Make everyone in the room turn to look at her outburst. Use ProWritingAid to highlight all your dialogue tags and get your emotion across in a stronger way.

THE CONTEXTUAL THESAURUS

The contextual thesaurus allows you to explore a range of synonyms by double-clicking any word. Unlike most thesaurus suggestions, our report offers replacement words that fit within that context of that sentence.

THE DICTION REPORT

When it comes to writing, less is more. Too often, writers try to sound authoritative by saying simple things in wordy ways. Why write “has the ability to” when you can write “can”? You’re just using more words to say the same thing, which makes your writing less clear. We’ll find these unnecessarily verbose phrases so you can make every word count.

THE ALLITERATION REPORT

Alliteration creates a pleasant rhythm when reading and so is often used in fiction, poetry and even advertising. Spark creativity by using ProWritingAid to highlight all instances of alliteration in your text.

THE HOMONYM CHECK

Homonyms are words that sound the same and are spelled alike but have different meanings – and they slip past spellcheckers all the time! Our check will also catch homographs (words that are spelled the same but sound different and have different meanings) and homophones (words that sound the same but have different spellings and different meanings). If you write *He lost his patients* but really meant *He lost his patience*, your spellchecker won’t flag it as an error. The ProWritingAid tool will highlight every word in your document with a homonym, homograph and homophone so you can double-check that you have it correct.

THE ACRONYM CHECK

The Acronym Report creates a list of all the acronyms you have used. Misspelled or inconsistent acronyms are not usually picked up by normal spell-checkers, so this list allows you to easily scan for errors. It can also help you create a glossary of acronyms for your text.

THE HOUSE STYLE CHECK

Create customized reports to look for specific issues based on your needs. If you are a sports writer, input all the players’ names to make sure that they are spelled correctly. If you are a fashion designer, create a rule that “fall collection” should always be flagged and corrected to “autumn collection”. If you’re writing for a client, you can input their style guide rules into ProWritingAid and the software will flag any deviations for you. Create the ProWritingAid report that YOU need.

THE PLAGIARISM REPORT

Plagiarism is a major concern for many people, especially those writing academic works. The plagiarism checks performed by ProWritingAid will check your work against over a billion web-pages and articles to make sure that you have correctly cited any unoriginal content. It is easy for unoriginal content to slip into your work, and the consequences can be disastrous. You need to purchase credits to use our plagiarism checker, available from as little as \$10.

OVER 20 TOOLS IN ONE

We’ve just taken a look at some of our best writing and editing tools. ProWritingAid is continually evolving to make sure writers have everything they need in one piece of software. Try our free version now and see what ProWritingAid can do for you.