
How to Edit Your Own Essay: Strategies for Multilingual Writers

Strategies

1. **Ask yourself, “What language issues challenge me most often?”** If you are not sure, start to keep a language learning log. A language learning log is a written record where you collect and keep track of words, phrases, sentences, grammatical concepts, or any examples of writing that you want to remember. By keeping this log, you will be able to refer back to your own notes and practice the techniques you have recorded.

A language learning log can be a helpful tool because:

- a. Writing information down in your own words reinforces memory.
 - b. Reading your own notes can be more helpful than outside resources because those notes are customized to your needs.
 - c. Keeping a language learning log is an easy way to keep track of personal language learning goals.
2. **Use this systematic process when reviewing your draft:**
 - a. List three main sentence-level concerns you have about your writing. Sentence-level concerns include grammar, punctuation, or anything that involves individual words or sentence structure. When making this list, it can be helpful to prioritize the concerns that most affect a reader’s ability to interpret your meaning.
 - b. Read through your paper looking only for the **first sentence-level concern** on your list. Using a ruler or piece of paper to cover everything except one line at a time can help focus your attention. Highlight or circle all instances of your first concern. By focusing on one concern at a time, the editing process will seem less overwhelming.
 - c. Next, repeat step b., but now, looking only for the **second sentence-level concern** on your list. Using a different color highlight or ink for each concern can help you visually distinguish between your different concerns.
 - d. Repeat step b. once again for your **third sentence-level concern** on your list.
 3. **Use Writing Center handouts.** Once you have identified your concerns, use our handouts on the Writing Center website to learn more about grammar and style.

Some Common Sentence-Level Concerns

If you’re having difficulty thinking of your own sentence-level concerns, consult the list below. While not all of these concerns affect meaning, they are common and may be worth looking for as you review your draft, especially if you are focused on the grammaticality of your sentences.

1. **Word Form:** These concerns usually arise where writers use a noun, verb, adjective, or adverb when another word form would be grammatical.

Noun Form : He was a very diligence student.

Adjective Form : He was a very diligent student.

The first sentence uses the noun form, “diligence,” but the word is describing the student. Thus the adjective “diligent” would be grammatical.

For more on word forms, see our quick-guide on [Choosing the Correct Word Form](#).

2. Subject-Verb Agreement:

Out of Agreement: She practice violin every day.

In Agreement: She practices violin every day.

The verb “practice” would be used with a plural subject, but in this case, the subject (“she,” the person doing the practicing) is singular, so the writer revised the verb to “practices” to maintain agreement.

For more on subject-verb agreement, see our [Subject-Verb Agreement](#) quick-guide.

3. Verb Tense and Form: This concern typically arises when a sentence involves both a main verb and an auxiliary verb or a modal and a main verb.

Main verb + auxiliary verb:

Simple Present: He was eat pizza at the party.

Past Progressive: He was eating pizza at the party.

The verb form in the first sentence, “eat,” is the simple present, which is used to describe an action that happens habitually (e.g., “I eat pizza every Friday.”) The past progressive form, “eating,” is used to express events or situations that were in progress at a particular time in the past. In this case, because the person was eating pizza at a party that already happened, the writer revised the sentence to include the past progressive verb form. *Helpful Note:* a helping verb like “was” will never come before the simple present.

For more on verb tenses, see our [Verb Tenses](#) quick-guide.

Modal + main verb:

Progressive form: We should buying groceries before the storm.

Root form: We should buy groceries before the storm.

When a modal (can, should, would, must, may) is used to describe a situation in the present, it will be followed by the root form of the verb. In this case, the writer revised the present participle “buying” to the root form “buy.”

For more information on modals, see our [Modal Verbs](#) quick-guide.

Other Helpful Strategies

- After you have followed the above steps, **ask a reliable friend** (or Writing Center tutor) to read over your paper.
- **Consult the *Longman Dictionary of American English*** during the self-editing process. This dictionary is designed specifically for non-native English speakers and provides valuable grammatical and syntactical information you won’t find in dictionaries for native speakers.

Adapted from: Cogie, Jane, Kim Strain, and Sharon Lorinskas. “Avoiding the Proofreading Trap: The Value of the Error Correction Process.” [The Writing Center Journal](#) 19.2 (1999): 7-31.

Last updated 2/16/2021