

Editing Your Writing

You've almost made it! Editing your writing is crucial to making sure your message comes across. Punctuation and paragraphs make it easier for your reader to understand what you're saying. Spelling mistakes can distract a reader from what you are writing and even make them think less of your ideas!

EVEN IF YOU USE A WORD PROCESSOR THAT HAS "GRAMMAR AND SPELLING CHECK" YOU MUST EDIT.

Remember: machines are dumb, you are smart. Machines make assumptions about what you are trying to say and they don't always guess correctly.

Luckily, author Ralph Fletcher has some terrific suggestions for making editing easier. Grab a red, green, orange, and blue pen and sit down with your work. Here goes:

1. **Red Pen** - Pick up your red pen and read your entire piece through checking for end punctuation. Does each sentence end in a period, question mark, or (very rarely) an exclamation point? Use no more than one "connector" per sentence (and, but, so then, however, yet, etc.) If there is more than one, chances are you can split it into two sentences or rewrite it to make it more clear. **USE YOUR RED PEN FOR COMMAS AND APOSTROPHES, TOO. ASK AN ADULT FOR HELP.**
2. **Green Pen** - Pick up your green pen and read your entire piece through checking for capitals. Capitalize names of people and places, months, days, and the first word of every sentence.
3. **Orange Pen** - Pick up your orange pen and read your entire piece through, putting in paragraphs when you need them. You need a new paragraph whenever:
 1. You start explaining a new idea, or a new piece of a larger idea
 2. Time passes
 3. A different person is speaking
4. **Blue Pen** - Pick up your blue pen and read your entire piece **BUT THIS TIME, READ IT BACKWARDS!** Circle any words about whose spelling you are not sure. Reading backwards keeps you focussed on the spelling, not the ideas. It's what professional proofreaders do.

There, that's it. You've done it. Make the changes that you've found and give your piece to an adult for another edit. Two sets of eyes always find more than one and they may know some grammar hints you have not learned yet.