

Copy Editing Guide (for nonfiction)

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This e-booklet is free for anyone who is working on a niche-market nonfiction book. If you find it useful, please send me an email at

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Introduction

So you're writing a nonfiction book. Congratulations! You've made a good decision. Nonfiction books sell far better than fiction and have a longer shelf-life. But more important, by writing what you know, you're sharing your information with the world, helping people to solve problems that they otherwise wouldn't be able to solve.

You have your own reasons for writing your book, but maybe they include these reasons as well:

- ▶ to help others in a situation similar to yours
- ▶ to enhance your professional status
- ▶ to detail a method you've developed so that other professionals can use it

Sellable nonfiction books include

- ▶ how-to books
- ▶ self-help books
- ▶ manuals
- ▶ guidebooks and handbooks
- ▶ methods and approaches particular to an area of specialization
- ▶ educational books for children, youth, and parents

Nonfiction is not fiction.

Of course you realize that. Everyone knows that writing a nonfiction book is not the same as writing a story. First of all, you have to be a great writer to write stories. You have to be able to create characters and write dialogue.

But for nonfiction, you just have to have a great idea and the determination and self-discipline to bring it to the world.

A good nonfiction book isn't just a book: it's also a **learning tool**. Your purpose is to **inform and instruct**, not to entertain. Think of writing nonfiction as carving a tool, rather than a creating art. If the tool is useful, it will sell. So your goal is to create a learning tool that your customers will want to use.

But don't go off to the races yet!

Before you get started, you have to decide what the final book will look like. Unlike novels, where you start with "On a dark and stormy night" and move right on into the good stuff, for nonfiction, you have to start with an **end product in mind**.

Nonfiction books have a certain **look and feel** to them. Some are pages of paragraphs, similar to a novel. But most present information in a variety of styles. We call this **chunking** the information. Layout chunks include text boxes, examples, pull-quotes, diagrams, margin notes, anecdotes, tables, figures, lists, and quotes, as well as headings and subheadings. How much chunking your topic needs will affect how you write it.

The **size** of the book is another choice you should make soon. Why write 250 pages if you're only going to use 125? Most novels are a standard paperback size, but nonfiction books can be pretty much any size: from little handbooks up to big picture books. What length would be appropriate for your audience?

Here's a suggestion: Spend some time at a library or bookstore leafing through books on topics related to yours. How long are they? What kind of fonts do they use? How much chunking is there? How formal are they?

Your book should match these books, but without being afraid to try something new and striking.

Plan on editing your own book.

Some writers get nervous at the idea of editing their own book. Who feels qualified to make things perfect? But here's the truth: Nobody's going to do it as well as you.

Having said that, here's the caveat that goes along with this booklet: **If you want your book to sell, then you need to get it professionally edited.** An objective, well-trained eye will find everything you missed in your own edit. Also important is to get a **substantive edit** early in the revision process—that is, an editor's assessment of the organization and focus of your book. The result will be a much better book.

Keep in mind that professional editors are **paid by the hour**. The more work they have to do, the more it costs you. If you've got a big budget for this project, then no problem.

But if you're like most first-time writers—trying to keep your expenses down—then you need to do as much editing as possible before you hand your manuscript over.

Who has time to edit?

Maybe not you. Maybe you prefer to let the professionals do everything. But keep in mind that an editor is going to reorganize your manuscript, rewrite your sentences, and twist your words and ideas around. It's going to drive you mad unless you understand what editing is.

The more you understand the typical problems that editors solve, the more smoothly the editing process will go. So read this booklet before you start writing. It will help you create a better manuscript, and it will help you cooperate with your editor in the final stages.

Will you choose a POD publisher?

POD refers to "print-on-demand," the new publishing technology that has changed the publishing industry forever. No more boxes of printed books in the basement or warehouse—POD prints a book just as it sells. It's lean, clean, and simple.

Sure, big publishers still exist. But they now have to focus exclusively on best-sellers in order to make enough money to stay afloat. They can't be bothered with little how-to and educational books that will sell 8,000 copies over their lifetime, even if those books are important.

This creates opportunities for you.

Small POD publishers have popped up everywhere, offering many different kinds of services at widely varying prices. They can get your book in print for a very low price.

But choose carefully.

Most POD publishers are set up to publish books in chapter format. Some permit nonfiction authors to include a few diagrams, but the number is very limited, and the placement of these diagrams is not under your control. Most don't allow text-boxes, margin notes, shaded boxes, and variations in type unless the author pays for a high-priced custom layout. As a result, an initial cost of a few hundred dollars can quickly balloon to thousands before your book hits the press.

Also beware of **vampire POD publishers**. These companies take your money to publish your book, but they don't care what the final product looks like or whether it's sellable. They don't take any cut of your sales profits, so they don't care if it sells.

Basically, beware of any book publisher than **allows you to publish a book without professional editing or without a (modest) custom layout**. These publishers are just printers. An unedited, unattractive nonfiction book is worthless, and you won't even be able to give it away.

Search for a POD publisher that gets a portion of its profits from the sales of the book. This is your only guarantee that the publisher will help you create a saleable book.

And in the meantime, edit your book.

Grab your pen. Let's get started!

What Makes a Good Nonfiction Book?

You decided months ago to write this book. For weeks, you jotted down ideas. Eventually, you organized them into chapters and started fleshing them into paragraphs. You figured out where you need headings, anecdotes, examples, text boxes, tables, graphs, and illustrations.

Good for you! The first big step is done.

Now it's time to do some real work.

1. Give it a rest.

The first step is the easiest: put the book away for a while.

You may think that your book is done as soon as you finish typing the final paragraph. But the first draft is just a starting point. It's going to change a lot before the final proof.

Remember that you look at your material from the **point of view of an expert**. Nobody else on the planet knows as much about this topic as you. You've probably been thinking and writing about this topic for months.

This means you're not objective anymore.

So put the manuscript away for a few weeks. This will give you fresh eyes for tackling the editing.

Don't be dismayed if you read it later and think it's dreadful. That's good. Now you're focusing on the communication, rather than the ideas. This is where editing begins.

2. Write with an audience in mind.

If you want your book to sell, you have to shape it for the readers, not for yourself. Even if you think your wording is perfectly clear, it might not be if you consider it from the point of view of a newbie.

Writing with a specific set of readers in mind is called **audience orientation** (as opposed to **writer orientation**). You *orient* the book for the audience, not for yourself. This means constantly imagining how your audience thinks.

Remember: New concepts are hard to learn. Your readers will need help in understanding your topic.

Here are some tips for connecting with your readers:

Audience focus: Think long and hard about your target audience. How old are they? What education level do they have? What about gender, interests, ability to focus? How much time are these people likely to have for reading? Try to picture someone like that reading your book. What kind of book would he/she need?

Style: Write in a style that this audience will enjoy reading. If your audience is young, write in a style for young readers. If you aren't sure what's the right style, spend some time at a library or bookstore studying books for this audience. How do other authors write for this audience?

Words: Use words and language that this audience is most likely to understand. If you're writing for your professional peers, use terms that they're familiar with. But if you're writing for patients, parents, kids, hobbyists, or politicians, then write in plain English. Avoid trying to impress anyone with big words and lofty style. The simpler your writing, the better.

Language: Write in straightforward, simple grammar with a relaxed, conversational tone. Speak to your reader directly: use *you*. This builds that connection to your readers and make your instructions easier to understand.

Ease of learning: Think about your key ideas from your audience's point of view. Which parts will be hardest for them to understand? Which will be easiest? Organize your book so that it moves from basic to advanced. Prepare the groundwork before you hit them with the big concepts.

2. Keep back copies and save often.

As you edit your book, **save a new copy each day**. Give it a new version number. Saving back copies takes the worry out of revising and editing. You'll feel free to use the hatchet more liberally. And often, that's just what the book needs. You know you're safe: you can always change your mind and go back to get something you cut out last week. Or better yet, you can use the leftovers to write a Book 2 or a blog on your book's website.

Also, always **back up your manuscript files** on a server or a hard disk. Too many books have died when a computer died or a laptop got stolen.

Organization

It's one thing to think of ideas; it's another to communicate them, especially to people who don't have your background or experience.

Ideas don't speak for themselves. An idea is wordless: it's just a thought in your brain. But a book is words and sentences organized in paragraphs and chapters. Just because it's easy to think those ideas, don't assume that it's easy to communicate them. In fact, simple ideas are often the most difficult to communicate.

Pull back from your ideas. Study your book as if you've never seen it before. Focus on the communication. How well do these sentences get your ideas across? If you didn't know anything about this topic, would you understand this section?

Editing for organization is called a "substantive edit."

A substantive edit is not the same as a **copy edit** (which focuses on grammar, spelling, style, punctuation, and consistency). The substantive edit comes first. There's no point focusing on grammar and punctuation till the book takes shape. So for now, we're going to leave all the grammar and spelling problems where they are, and your third grade teacher can just go ahead and roll over in her grave.

Here are the ideas you think about in your substantive edit:

1. What's the central question?

This is the meaning-of-the-universe question about your book.

There is an old saying among editors that until authors can sum up their books in **one sentence**, they're not ready to write. Now maybe that's a bit severe. But it shows how important the central question is.

Here are some examples of central questions for nonfiction books:

How can a teenager develop his/her own physiotherapy program?

What techniques help an art teacher bring out the natural talents in young children?

Are there workable solutions to the energy crisis?

Now look at your book. You have a draft together, so you must have some idea what it's about. Can you sum it up in a single question?

A good nonfiction book focuses relentlessly on answering this question. It doesn't digress or bring up interesting tangents, and it doesn't cover related information that really belongs in another book. Every word, paragraph, and diagram contributes to answering that single question.

Once you've written your central question (above), then write down the answer in one or two sentences. This is the central theme or lesson of your book:

Now re-read your manuscript very slowly. What parts don't focus on this question/answer? Those will probably have to go. If it really breaks your heart to cut something, mark it for placement in the margin, in a textbox, or in some other "chunk" that's separated from the main text of the book. You and your editor can make decisions about it later.

2. Less is more.

Long books aren't necessarily better than short books. You should have a target page range in mind, based on the length of similar books for similar audiences. Too much information is as bad as too little. Your theories, philosophies, and musings may have been important in development of the book, but too much non-concrete information will bog down your readers.

Remember that Book 2 and the blog on your promotional website are going to need material. Don't try to stuff everything into one book.

3. Edit with the table of contents.

Here's a quick and effective way to assess your book's current organization: study the table of contents.

After all, the table of contents shows the framework of your book. Editing that framework will show you where the organization is going astray.

Print a complete table of contents, including chapter numbers, chapter titles, and all heading levels. Read it with a pen in your hand.

Look for the flow and direction of your chapters. Highlight anything that seems to break the pattern. There should be no back-and-forth. The topic should progress from basic to advanced, or from problem to solution, without backtracking, zigzagging, overlapping, or jumping ahead.

If you find problems, try moving chapters and headings around to see what the organization would look like if you changed the order.

There's nothing wrong with spending a few days at this. Get your colleagues to look it over. This is the time to find problems, not after the book is written.

4. Beware of signposting.

Signposts are those arrow-shaped signs at road intersections, telling you what's where. In a manuscript, signposting refers to sentences that direct the reader backward or forward to another part of the book. Here is an example:

Earthquake preparedness is covered more thoroughly in Chapter 4. To learn more about emergency procedures, see Chapter 2.

Sometimes signposting is necessary. There is just no other way to present the material. But most of the time, it's a sign of a deeper organizational problem. It usually means that you haven't grouped your information well, and some information from another chapter has found its way here.

Try removing the signposts and moving the text to group it with related information. You may have to revise the organization of a few chapters to do it. You might find that the new organization works much better than the original organization.

5. Chunk your information.

Books for learning organize information into layout chunks. Layout chunks are anecdotes, tips, hypothetical problems with questions, case studies, summaries, examples, trivia, definitions, tangents, and review questions. Chunks have their own framework and stand on their own. They're part of the design of the book.

Now that we've brought up layout, you may need to think a little more about the design of your book. How big are your pages going to be? How much white space do you want on the page? Then consider the options for layout chunks:

- ▶ **Tips, trivia, tangents, and definitions** can be placed in the margin or in boxes, depending on their length.
- ▶ **Anecdotes, examples, case studies, and problem/answer sections** usually go in framed or frameless boxes, with a different font from the main text.
- ▶ **Summaries and review questions** usually have a different layout and a standard placement at the end of the chapters.

Mark information for layout chunks right in your manuscript. Don't bother using fancy textbox features: they just get in the way. Simply place square brackets [] around the text and start it with a one- or two-word identifier (e.g., TEXTBOX, EXAMPLE BOX, ANECDOTE).

Keep in mind that many POD publishers will not do varied layouts. They publish only straight-text books. If you want your nonfiction book to have an attractive layout that makes learning easy, then you'll have to hunt around for a POD publisher that specializes in books for learning.

6. Organize with headings and subheadings.

What are the headings for?

- ▶ They help focus the reader on the topic of the section. Nonfiction books avoid surprises and suspense.
- ▶ They make the organization of the chapter scannable to the eye.
- ▶ They help readers locate information when they're using the book as a resource.

Nonfiction books usually have two levels of headings, and some have three. Create first-level heading for the main topics of a chapter (usually two to five headings) and subheadings for the topics within each topic.

7. Add anecdotes and vignettes.

Anecdotes and vignettes are **stories**. They're important to a nonfiction book because they're often the only bits of narrative. People really like reading narratives. They connect with your topic through the stories you tell about other people. So narratives are important for the success of your book.

The best kinds of anecdotes and vignettes are **real**—stories from the news, from history, or from your professional practice. But made-up anecdotes are useful too, especially to help the reader visualize the problems and solutions in real life.

One standard strategy is to start every chapter with an anecdote or vignette. The readers relax because the opening is inviting and easy to relate to. More important, they start feeling a connection with the characters and their problems. Once your readers are hooked on the topic, you can transition to your main content.

Normally the opening vignette is **open-ended**: you introduce a problem but stop the narrative before you get to the solution. This technique creates curiosity and interest in your topic. In contrast, later anecdotes and case studies present problems but move swiftly into solutions that illustrate a point you've just explained.

Two tips:

- ▶ Remember to provide **sources** for borrowed anecdotes, even if you summarize them. A small footnote to a news source at the bottom of a textbox is sufficient.
- ▶ Always give the anecdote character a **name** (first name only), even if you change it. Avoid nameless characters—they're harder to identify with.

8. Include summary sections.

Books for learning are like mini textbooks. The chapters often end with a brief summary of the main points (usually in a bullet list) and a few questions to answer. You want to get your readers to apply the information while it's still fresh in their minds.

Decide what kind of "review" your target audience would want.

- ▶ **For younger readers:** Activities are good for reinforcing the main points.
- ▶ **For professional readers:** Case studies and clinical examples are useful for exploring the concepts.
- ▶ **For general public readers:** Rate-yourself quizzes with scoring sections are very popular.

7. Add visual impact.

Remember the expression *The medium is the message*. It means **how you say something is even more important than what you say**.

Design and layout is important:

- ▶ Is your book going to be dense with text, or will there be white space?
- ▶ Will there be bullet lists, numbered lists, and different text styles in boxes?
- ▶ Will there be graphics, such as lines and greyed areas?
- ▶ Will there be diagrams, charts, tables, and illustrations?

Visual impact is especially important in books for learning. Learning is hard work, and you don't want your readers getting bored or tired because your pages are dull. More than that, your readers have to do more than just read: they have to learn, integrate the information into their own ideas and theories, and, ideally, change their actions. So you need to make your ideas as easy to look at as possible.

Work with your editor and layout person to decide how much visual impact your book needs. In the draft stage, you can work on the following:

Figures and tables: Use software to make them look complete. Provide a title, and label each part clearly. For data or ideas taken from any source other than yourself, you must provide a source note at the bottom of the figure.

Diagrams, illustrations, and art: Hand-draw these if necessary, even if you get an artist to redo them for you. Basic computer drawing programs are often sufficient for creating clear diagrams. If the art has been created by someone other than yourself, you must get written permission to use it. Keep the permission on file. Include a source note in small type at the bottom. Your layout person can help you decide where to place the source notes later.

Cartoons and comics: Avoid using cartoons and comics unless they're your own or you've paid someone to draw them. All cartoons are covered by copyright laws. Cartoons and comics are great in books for young readers, but only if they're original, and only if they contribute to answering the central question.

Instruction boxes: Give each box a title: for example, *How to Build a Relationship With a Client*. Then number each step in a list. Start each step with a verb.

Photos: Unless they are crisply clear, high-contrast photos, avoid using them. POD printers have variable results with photos. They can come out grainy and impossible to see. Substitute with diagrams.

8. Get a professional second opinion.

Once you've finished *your* substantive edit, give it to a professional editor for their perspective. Ask for a quick reading and suggestions for changes.

Then polish the organization and get ready for the copy edit.

Chapter 3: Grammar, Spelling, and Style

Ow, the copy edit! Oh, my brain! Oh, my eyes! Stop the pain!

Relax. It's not that bad.

For some reason, people drag around a lot of emotional baggage about grammar, spelling, and style. You don't need to. Whatever you miss in your own copy edit, your editor will pick up. So no sweat.

At this stage, your goal is just to make sure the language in your book is easy to read. The sentences have to be simple and clear, the vocabulary correct, and the grammar standard.

If you plan on doing a very thorough copy edit, then purchase a user-friendly grammar book. The back of this booklet suggests some popular titles.

The following suggestions focus on the most common problems in nonfiction writing.

1. Remove passive voice.

Passive voice is a way of saying sentences backwards. Regular sentences are presented in **active voice**, which looks like this:

AGENT (Do-er)	DOES SOMETHING	TO SOMETHING
John	threw	the ball.
Everyone	visits	fast-food restaurants

But passive voice flips the order backward:

SOMETHING	GETS DONE	AGENT (Do-er)
The ball	was thrown.	?
Fast-food restaurants	get visited often.	?

This may not seem like much of a big deal. But passive voice sentences are hard to read. They hide the agents, so your readers don't really know who's doing the action in the sentence. Worse, these sentences are really boring to read. Readers' minds get lulled to sleep unless they see action.

How to spot passive voice sentences:

1. Look for boring paragraphs. Passive voice is dull. Boredom is a big clue.
2. Look for the verb in a sentence. It will be some kind of action.

Authors **have to identify** their goals of their book.

Make sure that the agent is in the sentence. If the sentence is in active voice, the agent will come before the verb. If the agent comes after the verb or is missing entirely, then the sentence is in passive voice.

The goals of the book **will have to be identified**.

[Who or what is doing the identifying? The sentence doesn't say.]

3. Rewrite the sentence placing an agent in front of the verb.

✓ **You** will need to **identify** the goals of the book.

A special note on command forms:

The command form in English normally drops the word *you*. *You* is the agent in these sentences:

✓ Bake it at 350 degrees. [**You**] Bake it at 350 degrees.

✓ Describe the process. [**You**] Describe the process.

But don't try to flip command sentences around. They're not in passive voice. Commands are solid, active sentences. In fact, the more commands you can use, the better.

2. Remove weak openers.

Weak openers are sometimes called **expletives**. The most frequently used expletives are

There is/are: **There** is a revolution coming along soon.

It is: **It's** important for writers to avoid expletives.

What's wrong with expletives? They start with a word that's just a **placeholder**. The *There* doesn't refer to a place, and the *It* doesn't refer to anything in particular. The lack of a strong opening word makes the sentence sound lame.

You're allowed to use expletives, but very sparingly. They're dull to read, and they cause confusion. Unless it's impossible, remove the expletive and rework the sentence without it.

- ✓ A revolution is coming along soon.
- ✓ Avoid expletives.
- ✓ Avoiding expletives is important.
- ✓ Writers should avoid expletives.

Special note about *in* phrases:

Watch out for sentences that start with *in*—they often use a vague *it* (or *they* or *we*) to start the main part of the sentence. Get rid of the *in* to solve the problem.

- ✗ **In** this book, **it** says that writers should avoid expletives.
- ✗ **In** this book, **they** say that writers should avoid expletives.
- ✓ This book states that writers should avoid expletives.

3. Change nouns back into verbs.

Verbs are stronger than nouns. Good sentences focus on one or two strong verbs, because that's where the action and interest is.

But in English, verbs can very easily become nouns. All you have to do is add *-tion* or some other noun ending, or put *the* in front of the word. Then presto, your verbs have become nouns.

- ✗ They had **expectations** of the **arrival** of the device experiencing a **delay**.

Notice how this noun-heavy sentence is hard to read. That's why you have to get rid of noun-heavy sentences. Find all the verbs that have been changed into nouns and change them back.

Verbs: expect arrive delay

- ✓ They **expected** the device to be **delayed**.
- ✓ They **expected** the device to **arrive** late.

4. Paragraphs must start with a topic sentence

The opening sentence of every paragraph has to state the topic of that sentence. (Like this one.) If it doesn't, then the readers will already be lost. The content of the paragraph will read like a jumble of unrelated points, and your point will be lost.

To find those incomplete paragraphs, collect the first sentences from every paragraph in the chapter. Then arrange them as a single paragraph in a separate document. Read this paragraph. It should summarize the chapter clearly and coherently. If certain sentences stand out because they sound awkward or out of place, then they're probably not topic sentences. Go back to the chapter, and write a real topic sentence for those paragraphs.

5. Keep pronouns consistent.

Pronouns are placeholder words, such as *he*, *she*, *we*, *they*, *it*, *you*, and *I*. A pronoun has to refer back to a specific person (or thing). This is easy when you're writing a story. But what about when you're writing instructions? If you don't consciously choose your pronouns and stick with them, you'll end up using different pronouns in every sentence. The reader won't know who you're talking about.

✗ [You] Start by writing a paragraph, using a few pronouns. Then we switch to a new pronoun. Nothing else has changed. They just replaced one pronoun for another (and switched from present tense to past tense).

Many nonfiction writers use the pronoun *you* to refer to the reader—and this is an excellent choice. But this means you can't switch to *we* or *they*.

Also, beware of the pronoun *we*. A lot of writers use *we* when they don't know what other pronoun to use. They'll use *we* to refer to their profession

Our clients are usually young and male.

then to their country

Our constitution states that we have the right to freedom of religion.

then to the readers

We need to make sure we don't set the temperature too high.

and some even use a regal *we* to refer to themselves

We'll begin by discussing the set-up.

None of these is incorrect, as long as you keep things consistent. The reader will get confused if it's not clear or if you keep switching we's.

6. Keep tenses consistent.

Avoid shifting from past tense to present tense. This is especially problematic in anecdotes:

✗ The group **began** [past tense] to study the report. One member **says** [present tense] that he **doesn't like** [present tense] the implications. Everyone **laughed** [past tense].

✓ The group **began** to study the report. One member **said** that he **didn't like** the implications. Everyone **laughed**.

7. Vary sentence length

Paragraphs full of long, convoluted sentences are hard to read. Readers get tired. They put your book down and go surf the Internet.

You don't want that. So vary your sentence lengths. Some can be long, but some should be short. Short sentences can be very, very effective.

Here's a general rule to follow: If you've just written three long sentences, make the fourth one short. This allows the reader to regroup before wading into more long sentences.

8. Avoid interrupting the subject and verb.

Everybody hates interruptions.

Interrupting a subject and a verb is disruptive. Subjects and verbs belong together. They're the meat of the sentence. Your reader has to connect those two words, or the sentence won't make sense.

So here's the rule: The subject and verb of a sentence have to be placed close together. Avoid allowing long phrases to come between them. Your readers might get lost in the phrase and forget what the subject was.

✗ The **foreman**, after winning the lottery and impulsively running off to the tropics without informing anyone in advance, **quit** his job.

To fix these problems, pull the interrupting phrase out of the sentence and place it either at the beginning (before the subject) or at the end (after the verb). Consider splitting long phrases.

- ✓ After winning the lottery and impulsively running off to the tropics, the **foreman quit** his job. He hadn't even informed anyone in advance.

9. Tweak misplaced modifiers

Modifiers are words that describe other words. Modifiers include phrases containing *-ed* and *-ing* verbs:

- ✓ **After arriving at the site**, the crew noticed the fire.

[The phrase **after arriving at the site** modifies the word **crew**. The sentence means **The crew arrived at the site and then noticed the fire.**]

Problems occur when the word that the modifier describes has been removed from the sentence:

- ✗ After arriving at the site, the fire was noticed by the crew.

[The phrase now modifies the word **fire**. The sentence now means **The fire arrived at the site, and then the crew noticed it.**]

Phrases with *-ed* and *-ing* verbs always modify the nearest noun. So make sure your phrases appear before the right noun.

- ✗ Barking up a tree, I saw a dog.
- ✓ I saw a dog barking up a tree.

10. Keep lists parallel.

Lists are very useful. Bulleted lists are great for pulling a bunch of related points together. Numbered lists make step-by-step instructions clear.

Write all items in a list in the same grammatical structure.

- ▶ If you use a capital and period for one, do it for all of them.
- ▶ If you use a command form, use a command form for all of them.
- ▶ If you start each item with a question word (how, where, when, why), keep up the pattern.

1. Set the temperature to 350 degrees. [command form]
- ✘ 2. The loaves should be formed and placed in the pans. [passive voice]
- ✓ 2. Form the loaves and place them in the pans.
3. Bake for 30 minutes. [command form]

Similarly, keep your headings parallel. Headings are more eye-scannable if they use the same grammatical structure.

Chapter 3: Using Filters

Purchasing Filters

Preparing the Screen

✘ How to Adjust the Setup

✓ Adjusting the Setup

Chapter 4: Example of an Edited Page

Below is a manuscript page from a book for teachers. The chapter it's taken from discusses contract learning. On the next page is the edited version.

Read both versions and compare them. Notice if your eye has to go back to reread a sentence because you don't understand it. Also notice where you get bored.

You'll probably find that the "chunked" information of the revised version is far easier to read and understand than the paragraphs. As well, you'll probably find you like simple language and short sentences more than long, wordy sentences.

This doesn't mean that you shouldn't use paragraphs. In fact, paragraphs will always be the majority of your text. In many ways, this edit is exaggerated to prove a point. But you have to write them simply and clearly and chunk information wherever possible. Otherwise, your readers will get bored.

Original:

Contract learning is based on a clear picture of what students can do that will aptly demonstrate their learning (see Figure 8.10). At the outset of each unit, the teacher will focus on clearly identifying what tasks will form the substance of the unit. These will form a list that the teacher will provide in a displayable format in the classroom. The display should be designed to give the teacher an "at a glance" view of students' progress through the tasks.

The teacher's next instructional task will be to determine what skills individual students may lack but are necessary to help them complete the tasks successfully. However, unlike direct instruction, the teacher's role in a unit managed through contract learning is that of a guide and mentor. The teacher will teach to individuals and small groups when students are required to know more in order to complete high-quality tasks to demonstrate their learning. Using this approach, learning becomes personalized and precise. Large-group instruction time is minimal. This is differentiation (see Chapter 10) at its instructional best because the teacher will teach what is needed for immediate tasks as students address each task and the students will have a need to know.

One considerable advantage of the use of contract learning is its motivational value. Because students have some choice about when, how, and with whom they work on specific tasks, they tend to be strongly motivated and on-task behaviour increases. Along with this, misbehaviour and off-task time decreases. The tone of the classroom often changes and students will be noticeably more relaxed and less anxious.

Revised:

What is Contract Learning?

Contract learning shows how students can demonstrate what they've learned (See Figure 8.10).

Steps in Contract Learning:

1. At the beginning of a unit, identify the main tasks of the unit.
2. Write the tasks as a list for the students to see. Use a whiteboard, blackboard, or poster paper.
3. Use the list as an “at a glance” reminder of what you are looking for in student progress.
4. Decide what skills are necessary for the unit. Then identify which students don't yet have those skills and plan how to help them.
5. Be a guide and mentor, rather than a teacher. Teach only when students need more information in order to complete the next task—either individuals or small groups.

Advantages of the Contract Learning Approach:

- ▶ Learning is personalized and precise because it's targeted to student needs.
- ▶ Large-group instruction time is minimal.
- ▶ Students remain motivated.
- ▶ Students remain on task and misbehave less.
- ▶ The mood of the classroom is relaxed.

Contract-based learning is a good example of differentiation (see Chapter 10), because the teacher teaches just what the students need when they need it. As a result, it creates a happier, more successful classroom.

Professional Content

Finally, you're at the end of the editing. Your book is done—or is it? Here are some final steps for making your book more professional.

Most nonfiction books follow a standard format, especially for professional books. Which of these items you include in your book is your decision. However, you need to include at least some of them if you want your book to get the respect it deserves.

1. About the Author

Provide a 3–5 sentence bio for the back cover. Some books include a longer bio at the end of the book. Many also include a professional black-and-white head-shot.

2. Reviews

Get at least three professional reviews of your book for the back cover and website. Ideally, you should get these before you finalize the cover design. If you have a lot of strong reviews, consider including a page of review quotes on the first page. This will be the first thing Amazon buyers will see when they use Amazon's *Search Inside* tool.

3. Bibliography

Bibliographies are often called *Sources*, *References*, or *Works Cited*. If you haven't quoted anyone else's work or used their research, you can instead include a *Recommended Reading* section. But show that you have done some reading.

4. Introduction

Before you write a long-winded introduction, remember that Amazon's *Search Inside* tool shows only the first few pages of a book. A boring introduction will cost you sales. If you want to write an introduction, make it engaging. Use an anecdote, a vignette with warmth, a gripping news story, graphics and illustrations, or some other kind of interest-grabber. Craft a powerful and intriguing opening sentence.

5. Ending

You have a variety of options for ending your book. You can have a summary section, a set of case studies, or a question/answer section. You can also include a brief chapter discussing the importance of your topic. What feels right?

6. Index

Not all books need an index. The big question is whether someone is likely to use your book as a research resource. Will people need to look things up in the index? Or will your table of contents cover the content enough that an index isn't necessary? If you don't need one, don't create one. Note that for long books that present a lot of detail (e.g., *The Complete Guide to Gerbil Care*), you definitely need an index, and you should hire a professional indexer to create it.

7. Title

Titles have to be catchy. Books sell because of their title. But since most buyers search for books online, your title also has to include key words that a search engine can pick up. The solution is to create a two-part title. The main title is the clever phrase that creates interest, and the subtitle contains the key words you want a search engine to find. Examine the titles in the resource page that follows for excellent examples of two-part titles.

Useful Resources

Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation, Style, and Usage

Cochrane, James. *Between You and I: A Little Book of Bad English*.

Gordon, Karen Elizabeth. *The Deluxe Transitive Vampire: A Grammar Handbook for the Innocent, the Eager, and the Doomed*.

Gordon, Karen Elizabeth. *The Well-Tempered Sentence: A Punctuation Handbook for the Innocent, the Eager, and the Doomed*.

O'Connor, Patricia. *Woe is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English*.

Walsh, Bill. *Elephants of Style: A Trunkload of Tips on the Big Issues and Gray Areas of Contemporary American English*.

Walsh, Bill. *Lapsing Into a Comma: A Curmudgeon's Guide to the Many Things That Can Go Wrong in Print—and How to Avoid Them*.

Writing

Faigley, Lester. *Writing: A Guide for College and Beyond*.

Linkemer, Bobbi. *How to Write a Nonfiction Book: From Concept to Completion in 6 Months*.

Stine, Jean Marie. *Writing Successful Self-Help and How-To Books*

Weston, Anthony. *A Rulebook for Arguments*

Websites

Many colleges and universities have excellent grammar and writing websites that point out the common errors. Here are a few examples:

Purdue Online Writing Lab

Dr. Grammar (University of Northern Iowa)

Center for Writing Studies (University of Chicago)

Notes