



A GUIDE ON

# EDITING

FOR BUSY CODING  
WRITERS

Learn the art of creating knockout content!

Written by Sarah Mischinger from [codingwriter.com](https://codingwriter.com)

# About this guide

## The art of creating knockout content

Are you familiar with blogs or other media where the writing always seems on point? Are you wondering how the writers do that? How can they produce this perfect arrangement of words and provide valuable information at the same time?

The vast majority of writers don't deliver high-quality text in their first draft. Trust me on this one.

A big part of the magic happens after writing, that is during editing.

If you want to be an outstanding writer you have to become a good editor first (or hire someone who already is). For most of us, writing is a creative process in which we let our thoughts run wild. This is how it should be! Where's the fun in limiting ourselves and our writing by trying to be perfect?

Still, our audience wouldn't want to read our drafts. First, we must convert our creative chaos into something tangible and likable. We need to transform our content so that our readers can enjoy and understand it.

This guide is a starting point for enhancing your editing skills.

I'm providing you with tips, which are workable and have a positive impact on your text.

Rest assured that editing is something you can learn, like physics laws. All you have to do is to follow some rules, and as a result, you get a better text! Invest some time and keep practicing until editing comes as natural to you as tying your shoes.

*A note: I will mention some apps and tools I use that help me with my editing. I don't get paid for naming them – I'm only recommending what I genuinely use and like! Those apps are:*

**Grammarly:** <https://www.grammarly.com/>

**Hemingway editor:** <http://www.hemingwayapp.com/>

## For whom this guide is for

This guide is suitable for everyone who writes. And who does not? Most of us write every day whether it's articles, tutorials, emails or short tweets. I created this piece with developers in mind, but you can apply the following tips to any subject.

Also, if you are short on time or want to deal with more important things than editing – this guide's for you.

If you're a professional writer or a hobby novelist: You'll waste your time reading my guide! I'm sure you know the rules all too well :)

## TLDR; or: What you'll gain

This guide helps you with editing your texts and makes them more accessible and appealing to read.

Develop your writing and editing skills by employing this guide's tips, make sure to pay attention to your own writing style and keep practicing! Soon you'll be able even to write better drafts!

## First, the basics: What is editing

Editing is what you do after writing your draft, which is your first, raw version, to get your document into shape. This process takes place on various levels:

### Content

In this stage, you check if your content is correct and intelligible. Are your explanations understandable or are there further comments necessary? Are the points you make accurate and consistent?

### Structure

Did you write an appropriate introduction and conclusion? Are there subheadings and paragraphs in the right places?

### Style

Review sentence length, tone, consistency, use of passive voice, unnecessary phrases, repetition, etc.

We talk about this stage in detail in this guide.

After editing your content, you start with proofreading. Keep a look out for grammar as well as spelling mistakes, and wrong punctuation. It's practical to ask a friend for help with this, hire a professional proofreader, or at least use an app like Grammarly.

# Before you start editing

I don't recommend to dive right into editing after completing your draft. Instead, do this:

## Leave your text for at least 24 hours

A little separation from your writing will do you good. If possible, shy away from what you wrote for 48 hours (at least 24 hours).

After a long break, you will come back refreshed and with 'clearer eyes'. You will be able to look at your writing from a different perspective, find errors with ease, and know when you weren't intelligible.

## Change your text's look

Your mind gets pretty bored by looking at the same text for too long. An easy but helpful way to trick your brain: Change the font and size of your document. By changing its appearance, your brain might get more active again.

## Make breaks on a regular basis

Editing is hard work for your brain and requires indomitable focus. Planning some breaks into your workflow is ideal for freshening up. When you're getting tired over time, your document will be well edited at the beginning and not so well at the end. Also, make sure to have some snacks and lots of water ready!

## Think about printing it out

I'm a better editor if I have my writing printed out on paper. I use pens in different colors, make notes and then transfer changes into my digital version. If you haven't tried this yet – do it! You should know which medium you work best with.

# Let's get into editing

## Split overly long sentences

Apparently, many of us write sentences which are so long, complicated and larded with information that the reader forgets what we were writing about at the beginning and therefore has to read the monstrosity once again from the start, all while trying to keep everything in mind this time and trying not to lose the constant battle against cozy slumber. See? We all have seen longer and more complex sentences than the one above, but still, it's tiring to read. You never want to send your reader to bed too early!

How do you detect those soporific sentences? You are smart, and therefore you sure are capable of catching them on your own. If you find many commas or ideas in one sentence, go ahead and split it into several pieces.

To stay on the safe side, use the Hemingway editor where you see which parts are too long and complicated at a glance.

Do you have to rewrite all long sentences? No. After some practice, you will know when to shorten and when it's okay and/or necessary to keep a certain length.

Keep in mind that it's not enough to smash some full stops between phrases. Most of the time you will have to rewrite your new sentences a bit and connect them with transition words and phrases.

Transition words examples: However, otherwise, in general, usually, hence, all in all, ...

Get inspiration for your next writing project:

<http://www.smart-words.org/linking-words/transition-words.html>

Also, make sure to create a nice rhythmic mix of various lengthed sentences, so reading stays pleasant. An excellent way to review this is by reading your text out loud.

### Example:

#### 50+ word sentence:

Sometimes we just don't feel like doing something, and sometimes this is a feeling we can't get rid of, but I think we don't have to force ourselves to get our butt up every time and instead invest this time to explore our sub-conscience to answer the question: What is holding me back right now?

#### Split into 4 sentences:

Sometimes we just don't feel like doing something.

Unfortunately, this is a feeling we can't always get rid of. However, we don't have to force ourselves to get our butt up every time! Instead, we should

invest this time to explore our sub-conscience to answer the question: What is holding me back right now?

The second version is still not award-winning and overall a bit longer than the previous example, yet I think it's more interesting and appealing to read. It would be okay to combine the first two sentences, but I wanted to add a little break for emphasis between them, thus the line break.

## Avoid repetition

Are you a kind and gentle person?

In this simple example, you see what chaining words with the same meaning looks like. Get rid of either of those two adjectives so the sentence would end up like: Are you a nice person? Or: Are you a gentle person?

Let's look at a more challenging **example**:

Transfer the data to **your own private** server in no time!

Here we could delete 'own private' to write:

Transfer the data to **your** server in no time!

Why? It is *your* server, and thus it is clear that it is (in some form) your *own* or even your *private* one.

But, how about we still write:

Transfer the data to **your own** server in no time!

This sentence could live on a landing or sales page where we tell that data migration is a piece of cake with our product. By writing 'your own server' we're laying particular weight on this feature. We emphasize the possibility of taking one's stuff and moving somewhere else.

Repetition can also come in the form of common redundancies. We are using them in our daily conversations, that's why they can be a bit tricky to spot. Those phrases are engraved into our brains, and we hear them so often we wouldn't think of them as something to edit. An example most of you get as redundant is: CMS System. Content Management System System – are you serious?

But what about: We're **sharing** a flat **together**. Or: Register now for **free gifts**!

You don't need to write 'together' and 'free' in those examples – sharing already implies that someone else is involved and gifts are always free (at least they should be)!

Here you'll find a list of the 200 most common redundancies for your reference:

<https://www.thoughtco.com/common-redundancies-in-english-1692776>

Repetitions in any form aren't necessarily wrong and sometimes okay to use. The key is to know when to employ them and to be aware of their existence in your text! You have to decide if what you've written is repetitive in a meaningless way, or if you emphasize an idea, fact, feature, etc. like in the server example above.

## Bye-bye -ly adverbs!

First, what are adverbs anyway? Adverbs are words that often end with -ly and modify the meaning of an adjective, verb or another adverb.

While editing, you should look out for those adverbs, because they weaken your writing. Most times you can come up with a stronger verb or adjective to describe something.

### Examples:

It's raining **heavily** outside → better → It's pouring outside.

Your hair looks **pretty** → better → Your hair looks stunning.

He **quickly** drove to the cinema → better → He raced to the cinema.

Note: Technically, words like somewhere, always, quite, also, etc. are adverbs too but are fine to use. Look at this list of different modifiers:

<http://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-adverbs.html>

## When to use adverbs

You need adverbs when it's necessary to change a sentence's meaning!

### Example:

He erased all data from his hard drive.

With an adverb:

He **accidentally** erased all data from his hard drive.

Makes a huge difference, doesn't it?

## Minimalist approach

You may be a person who loves using adverbs, so combing through your text, searching adverbs and replacing them with stronger verbs is a lot of work. Often time is limited, which is why I'm telling you about my Minimalist approach – or let's call it 'the least you should do'-method.

Here you have a lookout for two words which you should delete on sight: very and really.

### Examples:

It's **very** hard to stay calm → It's hard to stay calm. Or: It's tough to stay calm.  
I **really** don't want to go to the match tomorrow. → I don't want to go to the match tomorrow.

You don't need those words. They don't have any meaning but are amplifiers of the words they're attached to.

Of course, there is a **But**: If you write in a casual style and need to emphasize that you would rather drink a glass of snail slime than go to the match tomorrow, you could use 'really' in the example above.

Even so, very and really are often overused – go ahead and delete them from an existing text of yours and see what difference it makes!

## Get rid of grammar expletives

Now, don't be afraid – I know it sounds scary, but grammar expletives are quite simple. Sentences, or constructions that begin with it, there or here, followed by the to-be-formed verb are so-called grammar expletives.

### Example:

**There are** a lot of programmers out there who never used Java before.

This sentence isn't wrong – it's just meh. What does 'there are' even mean, what it's referring to? Usually, 'there' should answer the question 'Where?', but it doesn't do that in this example. Furthermore, does it add value to the sentence above? No.

The focus should be on the programmers, but instead, 'there are' jumps in front and steals the show. By adding 'who have' the sentence tries to shift the attention to the programmers and gets wordy as a result.

A better version would be:

A lot of programmers out there never used Java before.

See the difference? Here, the focus is on the programmers instead of an unknown place which 'there are' implies. Plus, the sentence is much shorter and less complicated.

**Another example:**

**It's** awesome to code all day.

This sentence is concise so you might not feel the impact of using 'It is' at the beginning immediately. But do you see how wordy it is? Read this rewritten version for comparison:

Coding all day is awesome.

Boom, straight to the point. Go ahead and reread those two sentences – can you feel the difference between them? Again, by starting the sentence with a grammar expletive, we don't focus on 'code' but on 'it is'. Do you see any ultimate meaning or value in 'it is'? Well, I don't. And I have no clue what 'it' is referring to.

Wrapping things up: go through your text and search for sentences with there are/is, this is, it is, here is/are, etc. in it and rewrite them. Easy!

But, of course, exceptions do exist, and grammar expletives are sometimes fine to use.

**Example:**

Last year we went to a big conference in Italy. **It was** amazing!

Starting the sentence with 'it was' is okay here: In the previous sentence, I already clarified what 'it' refers to, namely the conference.

## Be more active

You undoubtedly already learned at school, that you should not write in the passive voice. Of course, it's not wrong doing so but when you go through your draft make sure to spot parts in passive voice and see if you can rewrite them to the active voice.

Passive voice often makes your writing sound stiff and vague. Also, it may make your sentences wordier, and thus longer, because you need more words to form it.

For those of you who don't remember much about **passive vs. active voice**:

Active: I wrote a guide about editing.

Passive: The guide about editing was written by me.

Active: The developers refactored all the code.

Passive: The code was refactored by the developers.

Active: Our project manager keeps our working schedule full.

Passive: Our working schedule is kept full.

Most people can spot passive voice sentences, but if you need some grammatical explanations, I refer you to this article:

<http://www.studyandexam.com/active-passive-voice.html>

In some cases, it's okay to use the passive voice, say, if you don't know who did something or if you have to write objectively (for science).

My MacBook was stolen. (You don't know who did it)

By channeling the body's atoms, the gravitational forces can be leveraged. (An example for scientific writing which I obviously made up)

Of course, you could still write:

Somebody stole my Macbook.

By channeling the body's atoms, we can leverage the gravitational forces.

If you're still struggling with this, use Grammarly or the Hemingway editor to find your passive voice sentences in a breeze. After some time you will be able to catch those phrases by yourself – like most things it just needs practice.

## Know your tendencies

When you're writing your draft, you will use some phrases or words over and over again. You have a specific way of writing, building sentences and using a particular vocabulary. This is your unique style which makes your writing *yours*.

But when you're editing you need to refine your style and bring it in a more readable form. Avoid repetition, stiff sentences, and irregular rhythm!

For me, such a phrase would be 'try to'. Honestly, I write this once or twice per paragraph! So when I go over my text, I search for this phrase and see if I can delete it (most times I don't need it anyway).

Also, I like to start my sentences with 'of course', so I try to come up with different starters.

Knowing how you write takes some time for you to notice if you're not writing on a regular basis. You could start a list in which you write down words and phrases you overuse. Additionally, add alternative words, phrases, and synonyms. Next time you're editing, take this list to help you to detect your tendencies. Keep an effort on keeping this list up to date and save yourself some precious time while editing.

## What's next

You can find a checklist with all editing steps at the end of this guide. This checklist covers all points we talked about earlier, but in a shorter form. I created it for you as a quick reference, so you don't have to read through the detailed descriptions every time!

Apply all these steps in your editing process, and your texts will be better! And maybe you will even find joy in editing because you now have a better sense of what you're actually doing.

Of course, there are more things you can do, like reducing prepositions (in, at, on, etc.) but this can take a lot of time and dedication. I understand that you're looking for quick tips on editing and hope my guide is helping you with your writing objectives!

Do you have any questions or feedback? Just let me know – I'm willing to edit this guide for your convenience and learning success!

Shoot a note at [sarah@codingwriter.com](mailto:sarah@codingwriter.com), and I'll get back at you!



# EDITING CHECKLIST

- ◆ Split overly long sentences
  - Detect sentences with many commas or ideas and split them
  - Use the Hemingway editor to get help detecting those sentences
  - Use transition words/phrases between your new sentences
  
- ◆ Avoid repetition and redundancy
  - Find chained words with the same meaning, like 'nice and kind', and delete unnecessary words
  - Check if you need repetition or redundancy to emphasize something
  - Check for common redundancies and get rid of the unnecessary ones
  
- ◆ Say bye to -ly adverbs
  - Try to come up with a stronger verb (it rains heavily -> it's pouring)
  - See if an adverb is really needed for what you want to say (he deleted everything vs. he accidentally deleted everything)
  
- ◆ Very and really can be tossed away
  - Search for 'very' and 'really' and delete them if possible
  - Decide if you need them to emphasize something and see if you can come up with something better (I really need to pee vs. I think my bladder is about to burst)
  
- ◆ Rewrite There/This/It/Here + are/is
  - Does There/this/it/here refer to something?
  - If it isn't clear what it refers to rewrite the sentence without using there/this/it/here is/are
  
- ◆ Prefer active voice
  - Detect cases of passive voice and see if you can rewrite them to active voice
  - Use Grammarly or the Hemingway editor for help
  
- ◆ Refine your style
  - Go through your list which includes all words, phrases and other elements you overuse in your writing and search for them
  - See if you can rewrite your text to avoid repetition and stiffness
  - Always keep your list up to date – add new findings, new alternatives and synonyms to help you with your editing