



University of Vermont Graduate Writing Center Fine-Tuning Your Paper Before Submission

Have you revised your paper but still wonder what else you should do before turning it in? This checklist provides some ideas for how to systematically look through your paper for common errors before pressing the "Submit" button.

- ☑ **Read your paper aloud**, have a friend read it aloud, or use the Microsoft Word "Read Aloud" function (Review > Read Aloud). If a sentence sounds long, cumbersome, or just "off," then it probably is! It may be helpful to reword the sentence or separate it into multiple ideas. Each sentence should only have one idea or point.
- ☑ **Consult the assignment rubric.** Your assignment rubric is an excellent final check before submitting. Go through the rubric to ensure that you have covered all parts of the assignment and all standards have been met.
- ☑ **Make sure each paragraph has a clear topic sentence.** Highlight or read through the first sentence of each of your paragraphs. The first sentence, or "topic sentence," should broadly introduce what the paragraph is about, and the following sentences should elaborate on that topic sentence.
- ☑ **Separate long paragraphs.** Read through each paragraph and consider, "What is this paragraph about?" If it feels difficult to summarize your paragraph in 1-2 sentences, then it may be helpful to separate it into multiple paragraphs.
- ☑ **Check for smooth transitions.** Read through your paper and check for sentences that seem disconnected from each other. Transition words like *first*, *next*, *however*, *moreover*, *additionally*, *next*, *consequently*, *similarly*, and *finally* help the reader to orient themselves in your writing.
- ☑ **Check for use of passive voice.** In general, aim to be specific by saying who did an action. For example, rather than "The title of queen was given to Elizabeth in 1953" (passive), a better option is "Elizabeth became queen in 1953" (active). This may or may not be necessary depending on your discipline. For example, the methods section of research often requires using the passive voice to avoid a focus on the researchers.
- ☑ **Define unknown terms.** Some professors expect their writers to practice writing for a public audience, for example parents who may not understand special education jargon in reports.

If this feels true for your discipline, read through your paper and highlight any terms that may not be common knowledge. Define each of those terms immediately after it is first introduced. For example, "Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, or CBT, is a type of psychological treatment which addresses unhelpful patterns of thinking and behavior."

- ☑ **Avoid anthropomorphism.** Make sure that you are attributing work to person(s) who did it rather than an inanimate source. A common mistake is to say, "This paper found" which makes it seem as though the paper itself did the research. To be more specific, you can say "The researchers found" or cite the authors themselves, e.g., "Jones et al. (2020) found."
- ☑ **Check for correct citations.** Check that your in-text citations and reference sheet match the standards for your discipline. Purdue Owl is an excellent place to start if you are not sure what citations should look like.
- ☑ **Take a break.** You may be especially hard on yourself if you have been writing all day and are tired and possibly hungry. Your writing will likely look much better, and edits may seem more feasible, after a night of sleep or at least stepping away from the computer and doing something you enjoy.