



WHAT IS COPY EDITING?

Line by line (stylistic details) versus
big picture (substantive)

If in doubt, leave it out or look it up

A matter of style

- Why bother? **Consistency and clarity** are key.
- Most publications have a **style guide**.
- My favourites include: **Canadian Press Stylebook**, **CP Caps and Spelling** and **Chicago Manual of Style**. Familiarize yourself with these tools. Grammar and spell check programs can help, but aren't a fail safe and can miss things. You should know what to look for (or look up).
- These essential guides dictate: **writing style, spelling** (e.g. British versus American), **grammar, punctuation** (e.g. one space after a period; whether to use the Oxford/serial comma) and more!

Fact-checking

- It's critical to **double-check facts**: names, titles, pronouns, numbers, date and time; any and all specific details need to be verified before being printed. **Include hyperlinks** in stories for ease of checking each source of information.
- **Ensure quotations are listed correctly** and with the right sources. These should add colour to the article to be worthy of inclusion.
- Printed and mistakes look unprofessional and erode reader trust.
- Your **credibility is at stake**. No one wants to get sued for **libel** (making false or malicious statements that harm, discredit or damage another person's reputation).

Other considerations

- Embrace **different perspectives**.
- **Communities outside your own** – be careful of language use and terminology. **Cultural sensitivity** – what is your perspective? Be specific and avoid stereotypes.
- **BIPOC** (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) – this term is not a catch-all substitute.
- **Indigenous groups** – include nation and/or community names when possible to avoid generalizations.
- Ensure **correct pronouns** are used as gender identity.
- Writing about **mental health issues or trauma need special attention** to ensure sensitive presentation versus re-victimizing. Be sure and include **trigger warnings** when including this type of information.

Display copy

- Headings, subheadings, photo captions and pull-quotes should engage and **entice a reader to read more**.
- Try to **summarize the story** into short attention-grabbing sentences.
- Use **word play, alliteration, strong action words** for effect.
- **Avoid repeating** words in headings and subheadings.
- Photo captions should **never state the obvious**, but offer new information or insight. Note: These are different from image descriptions for accessibility devices to read.
- Always **compare caption text to photos** to ensure they match.
- **Use key words** (important for SEO online).
- **Practice** makes perfect. This is a skill to master.

Read and re-read

- Read through all text more than once. Use each read to **look at different aspects** (e.g. proper spelling, punctuation, tenses, word usage).
- Remember to run the **Spell check** and **double space** finder.
- Once the page or online layout has been done, check dates, page numbers, bylines and titles.
- Do **separate reads** for display copy. Do photos have credits?
- In any layout look at overall spacing for things like widows/orphans and clipped text.
- With every new draft, check the changes.
- **Celebrate** the completion of every project!