



# THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Guide to copy-editing

The aim of copy-editing is to ensure that copy is clear, concise and easy to follow, consistent in editorial house style throughout, and without any ambiguity, wasted words or repetition. You can find the University's editorial house style at: [www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/communications-marketing/resources/publishing](http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/communications-marketing/resources/publishing).

It can be challenging to copy-edit your own work, and it is advisable to ask someone else to do this, preferably a professional copy-editor. You can contact the Publications team in CAM for further advice on this.

The following offers you a brief guide.

Try to keep the original writer's voice as much as possible. Avoid changing the meaning of a sentence, statement or phrase unless you are confident the original is erroneous. If you think the piece needs a complete rewrite or it has gone way over the agreed word count, ask your manager whether it should be sent back to the writer with clear instructions, or whether you are permitted to rewrite/cut it yourself. Address this before the copy is designed to save time.

Never assume the reader knows as much as you do about the subject. Would someone who is unfamiliar with this subject understand it? Don't 'dumb it down' but make sure it is easy to understand and nothing is ambiguous. Writers can often be too close to their subject, so examine the copy as if you are a reader coming to the information for the first time.

Cut out any superfluous material. Can something be said in a more concise way? The copy should always be clear and easy to read.

Avoid flamboyant language and use adjectives carefully. Consider if there are too many and may be standing in the way of clarity.

Avoid repetition. Repetition of phrases or words is easy to overlook. Consider if there is an alternative way of saying something if the same phrase keeps popping up.

Check for consistency. Are quote marks single or double? Do tenses jump around? Are people called by their first names or surnames throughout? Are their correct titles - Professor, Mr, Ms etc applied consistently and correctly? Do proper nouns have initial capitals or lower case throughout?

Does the copy flow in an ordered, sensible fashion, or do topics jump around?

### Marking up raw copy

Once you have finished copyediting, you need to explain things clearly to a designer. For example, where to place photographs and logos, if copy needs to be in bold or italics, if certain copy needs to be placed on a certain page etc.

If you want to bring the designer's attention to something, write any instructions in square brackets [ ] or chevrons < > preferably in a different colour to make it stand out, for example:

[Designer: Please make text bold with a grey screen behind it and a reversed out head]

<Designer: Please insert logo below this text>

To understand and use copyediting marks and symbols correctly, refer to *The Cambridge Handbook for Editors, Copy-editors and Proofreaders*.

If in any doubts, contact CAM:

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