



OST EDITING CHECKLIST

How to Self-Edit Prior to Turning Sections to Editors

After completing your section, go through this checklist and edit your section before it goes to the editor, as follows:

1. CONTENT:

Check your draft against the annotated outline – are there any sections missing? If so, put a placeholder to add these sections, or write them.

Search the section for compliance with the RFP: did you use the key words from the RFP requirement, and customer's terminology? Did you address every single element of the requirement paragraph?

Are all your facts and elements of the approach accurate? This is your chance to double-check.

Is your section consistent with the overall approach and other parts of the proposal? For example – are you quoting the same number of employees as other authors? Are the titles and names of those responsible for doing the work correct? It is time that you check with the rest of the team.

Is there information that is still missing? Take action to add it in.

Review other authors' sections and check your section for redundancy. Call it to the proposal manager's attention.

Make sure that you have included the win themes with benefits and proof.

Spell out all the acronyms the first time you use them in the section.

2. LENGTH and STRUCTURE:

Check the section length – are you within the page limit? If you are over the page limit, cut what you can without sacrificing the quality of the content. If you are within 10% of the required section length, do not worry about shortening any further – simple editing may cut the length naturally.

Move paragraphs and sentences in the paragraphs around for better section flow. Usually, the section has to flow in the following order:

- WHY (customer problem, challenge, or key risk factor behind the requirement)
- WHAT (what is it that we propose to do to respond to the requirement)
- WHO (who exactly is going to do this part of work, by name and title)
- HOW (step-by-step approach with benefits to the customer, and risk mitigation)



- WHEN (in what sequence we are going to do it in regards to the overall schedule, or when have we done something similar before to prove we can do it)
- WHERE (show the location, facility, or where have we done it before successfully?)
- WOW (powerful section conclusion)

Do you move from something that the evaluator already knows to something they do not, and from general to more detailed? If not, add missing information for clarity and/or move the paragraphs or sentences around.

Break up your long paragraphs into shorter ones with **no more than five** sentences per paragraph.

Make sure figures and graphics are clear and that they are introduced before they appear in the section.

3. SENTENCES AND WORDS:

Shorten your sentences to **fewer than 20 words**, and remove unnecessary filler words, like in the example below:

- **Bad:** Team X has physical storage facilities that are capable of qualifying for SECRET.
- **Better:** Team X has physical storage facilities capable of qualifying for SECRET.
- **Best:** Team X's physical storage facilities can qualify for SECRET.

Get rid of passive voice ("It is done" vs. "We do") as much as you can:

- **Bad:** This fact **is demonstrated** in our D&B report, which shows our excellent record of prompt payments and is a crucial element in sustaining a small business cash flow.
- **Better:** Our D&B report **demonstrates** this fact, displays our excellent record of prompt payments, and has helped to sustain a small business cash flow.
- There are legitimate uses for the passive voice: "*this new regulation was recently stipulated by FAR.*" But it's true that you can make your prose more lively and readable by using the active voice much more often. "*The dam was able to be repaired by three technicians*" isn't nearly as striking as "*three technicians repaired the dam.*" Over-use of passive constructions is irritating and hard-to-read.



- Getting rid of passive voice will also force you to answer the question – who does the work? It is perfectly OK to say “**we**” and “**our**” in the proposal – it makes it personal, and shows commitment.

Check for dangling and misplaced modifiers:

- Words or phrases which modify some other word or phrase in a sentence should be clearly, firmly joined to them and not dangle off on their own at the end of the sentence. Sometimes the dangling phrase is simply too far removed from the word it modifies, as in “Foaming in the pit, the team notes the effect of the added hypochlorite.” This makes it sound like the team itself is foaming, because it is the nearest noun to “foaming in the pit.” Move the dangling modifier closer to the word it really modifies: “hypochlorite.” “The team notes the effect of the added hypochlorite, foaming in the pit.”
- Sometimes it is unclear which of two possible words a modifier modifies: “Ground transportation costs are based on hourly rates and traffic flow.” Is the traffic flow determined hourly as well, or more (or less) often? Here’s a much clearer version: “Ground transportation costs are based on traffic flow and hourly rates.” “Hourly” now clearly modifies only “rates.”
- Dangling modifiers involving verbs are especially common and sometimes difficult to spot. For instance, consider this sentence: “Having purchased the warehouses, they now needed to be secured.” The sentence doesn’t state who did the purchasing. One way to fix this is to insert the name of someone and make the two halves of the sentence parallel in form: “The company, having purchased the warehouses, now needed to secure them.” If you have a person in mind, it is easy to forget the reader needs to be told about that person; but he or she can’t be just assumed.

Check whether each sentence is complete (get rid of the sentence fragments) – your Grammar Check function should identify these easily.

Weave your sentences together so that one sentence naturally flows to another.

Vary your sentence structure and length. Some sentences should be longer, and some should be shorter for better rhythm.

Eliminate unnecessary technical jargon and substitute it with plain English.

Substitute pretentious academic or bureaucratic language (“utilize” vs.

“use” and so on) with language that sounds more natural and conversational.

Eliminate vague, redundant, or overused words or expressions such as **time period**, **several aspects** or **many things**.



Cut out strings of little words such as the following: **to** change policy **in** **regard to** that problem at this point **in** time.

Check whether every word is indispensable and cut needless words: Don't say "storage facilities that are capable of providing..." Say "storage facilities that can provide..."

Cut out such flowery adjectives and adverbs as **very, seasoned, professional, world-class, premier, robust, solid**, etc.

Substitute weak verbs and nouns coupled with unnecessary adverbs and adjectives, with strong verbs and nouns. Use the article with the list of 80 power verbs provided separately.

Using CTRL+F function in Microsoft Word, look for the words "that" and "which" to see if you can simplify the sentence by getting rid of the word.

Using CTRL+F function in Microsoft Word, search for endings such as –ION, -IZE, and ENT. Rewrite the sentences to turn these nouns into verbs.

Using CTRL+F function in Microsoft Word, search for all forms of the verb "To Be" (is, are, was, were, will, being) and see if you get rid of the passive sentences, and substitute a to be verb+noun combo with a power verb. Get rid of the future tense where it is not necessary (we write in present tense).

Run readability statistics and make recommended corrections in accordance with the instructions provided by the proposal manager.



4. MECHANICS:

Run the spell check on your document – do not count on Microsoft Word to find all the spelling errors automatically. Word 2010 also checks for words out of context – true typos – make sure that you have this function turned on. It helps reading your document aloud to catch the typos.

Check your punctuation: Did you include a serial comma before an “*and*”? Did you use colons and semicolons correctly? Did you use parenthesis correctly?

Check for correct use of pronouns. When you use pronouns like **she**, **her**, **he**, **him**, **they**, **them**, **it**, **which**, or **that**, can you find the specific words earlier in the text to which these pronouns refer?

Did you spell out the numbers in accordance with the rules?

Check for usage of the word “you.” When you use the word **you** in your text, do you intend to be more personal in tone or more directive, or are you lapsing into this method of expression unconsciously? Use the second person **you** only when you want to speak to the government directly and show sincerity: “serve you”. **YOU** overused sounds too salesy.

Check proper capitalization of titles, names, acronyms.

Make sure that when you have a singular subject for your sentence, your verb is singular as well, even though it is removed from the subject. Make sure that plural subjects have plural verbs.

Is your verb tense consistent throughout the paper? We use future tense for tasks that will take place in the future when we win the project. For everything that we are already doing, we use present tense. We use past tense for past performance examples and anecdotes.