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FIRST THINGS FIRST: WRITE—REWRITE

Marilyn L. Grady

The first demand of writing productivity is to create the First Draft. One unproductive diversionary activity is to attempt to perfect your writing “too early.” It is more efficient to keep writing and get the initial draft completed before editing a manuscript. Early editing can be demoralizing and derail writing momentum and flow. It is better to forge ahead and continue to add to the manuscript until the complete paper has been prepared. Only when the first draft is completed should the serious work of revision begin.

The editing process may be more difficult than writing the initial draft of the manuscript. Editing takes patience and endless attention to detail. Editing requires self-critique! Editing requires a different approach than the creative flow of writing. Editing may not provide the same sense of satisfaction, productivity, and accomplishment one has when one is in the generative, free writing phase.

Editing, however, may be more important than the creative phase of writing. A manuscript that is not carefully edited may never “appear in print.” It is only through careful editing that an author’s ideas are revealed to the reader.

Editing demands attention to the many aspects of a manuscript. For instance, content and ideas may need to be changed. The sequence of the manuscript may require revision. Sentences may need to be revised. Spelling and punctuation may need attention.

Following are some of the considerations in the editing process. First, examine the introduction to make sure it sets the tone for the manuscript and draws the writer into the subject. It is important to make sure that the purpose of the manuscript is presented early in the text. Readers make the decision “to read, or not to read” based on this information.

Second, determine if the sequence of the paragraphs and content is appropriate. Third, read the text and make sure that each aspect is presented thoroughly yet concisely. Make sure that transitions are provided that ease the reader from one topic to the next topic. Fourth, examine the conclusions to assure that they summarize the main ideas of the manuscript and point to the implications of the report. Fifth, check the spelling, punctuation, and adherence to the dictates of the appropriate style manual.

Read the manuscript aloud! This will allow you to identify errors in grammar as well as awkward phrasing. Your ear is a fine adjunct to your eye in the editing process. The time spent editing your manuscript is possibly more important than the time spent writing the initial draft, since the editing reveals the hidden jewel in the rough manuscript.