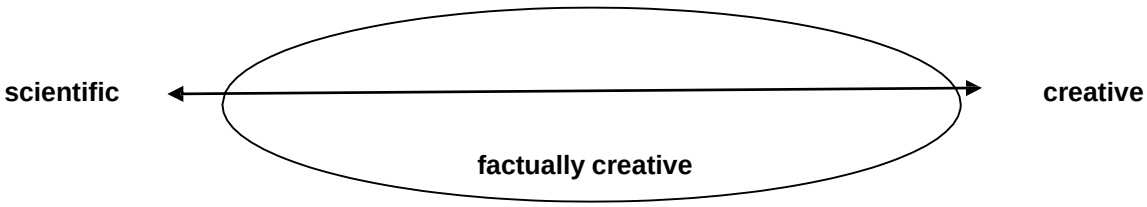
6 WRITTEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS

When considering communication a N2000 manager may concentrate on the spoken and personal communication, but in fact writing, and writing well to express the vision and goals of the N2000 site are equally important. Badly worded communication, overly technical language and poorly expressed writing can undermine all good verbal communications/ N2000 managers need not be poets or prize winning authors but an understanding of the differing written material needed and how to improve is a much needed and important skill

What do N2000 managers write and to whom?

Think through an average working day from the moment you get up until you go back to bed and consider everything you write throughout the day, from the smallest of notes, the many emails, the tweets, the letters, the funding applications to the most complex of scientific reports.

Most written material can be placed along a spectrum of highly legalistic and scientific material through to very creative and poetic. All are used in a N2000 site.



EXERCISE Using the list of written material we generate place them where you think they should be along the spectrum, e.g:

- laws
- scientific abstract
- regulations
- contracts
- funding applications;
- reports
- emails information
- boards;
- press releases;
- newsletters;
- letters;
- scripts;
- interpretation boards,
- nature centre material for children,
- art work



Much scientific and legalistic or technical writing could be considered a more **left brain activity**, whereas the more **creative writing much more right brain**. Differing writing skills will apply for technical writing and creative (interpretive) writing.

A lot of what we write could be defined as **"factually creative"** requiring us to move from left to right brain activity, getting the balance just right. This requires the N2000 manger to take factual information usually biological, scientific or legal and write it in “everyday language”. Much of what is written, especially for stakeholders, does not need to be too technical, despite this technical style being the default of most N2000 managers. Factually creative writing, is quite a difficult form of writing to master and takes time and practise to get right.

As with all communications it is important to understand:

A) What the message is you are trying to convey and being clear is producing it: Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation are the basics of good writing.

B) What is the right media or channel for that message: Who needs to read it? How long is the message? You will need to know this before you decide on what media to use. For example… should we send an emergency message over sms





When we don't need words: words and images

Sometimes however, we need to use few, wellchosen words to get our message across. And off course, a picture is worth a thousand words, so consider if an image is more appropriate than many word.





Consider what words come to mind to describe how you feel when you see these pictures. This is the feeling or thoughts you want to convey to your audience.

Are the words different what people are present in the picture? Make sure they do not contradict one another and are seasonally appropriate.

Give some thought when selecting images, that they do not contradict your words, and vice versa. In N2000 sites, showing pictures of the kind of activities and behaviours you are inviting people to take part in, reinforces that positive images.

Do bear in mind people may have different associations with images than you assume. However even with images we can easily get it wrong!!





Even with "basic images and signs" There can be not enough information confusing and conflicting information and indeed too much information.



So even with simple signage consider carefully the perspective of the visitor or at best someone who is not familiar with your site. IT may seem "obvious" to you... but test your images first for clarity

6.1 HOW DO WE WRITE?

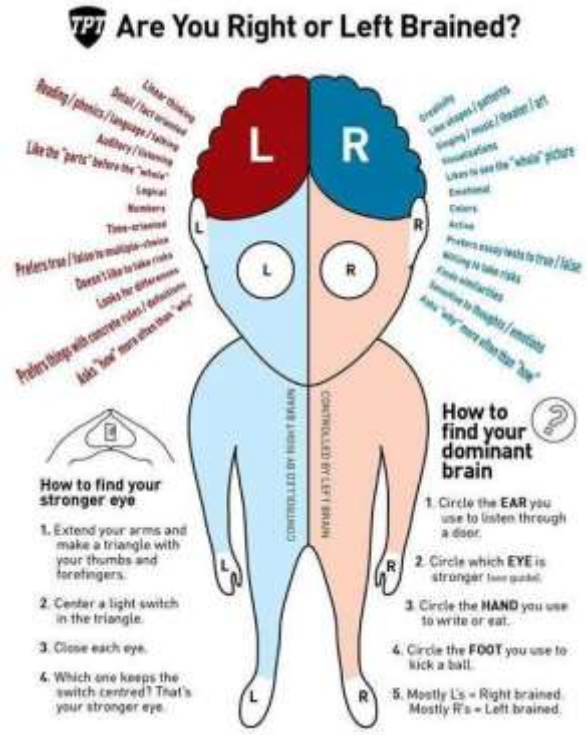
We learned to write as young children, and have no doubt been writing most of our lives, even if nowadays we use a keyboard more often than a pen.

In order to compose a piece of writing it requires us to use different parts of our brain, all elements we already have, but may have a greater tendency or preference for certain styles.

EXAMPLE: Say the COLOUR not the word.



This is a right /left brain conflict where the right side tries to say the colour and the left insists on reading the word. You may find this gets easier as you go on...you rare exercising and training your brain. You can do the same as you practise different styles of writing.



Different types of writing

Having identified earlier the different style of writing a lot of it is a left brain activity using logic detail, language, grammar etc. but as we need to be creative too, especially in interpretation then we do need to access right side brain too through imagination, fantasy, symbols and imagery.

N2000 writing tends mainly at present to be very factual and scientific but it needs still to be well written, clear and understandable. Writing take practise: you made find through natural tendency, or just though education and experience you are better and more comfortable in technical language.

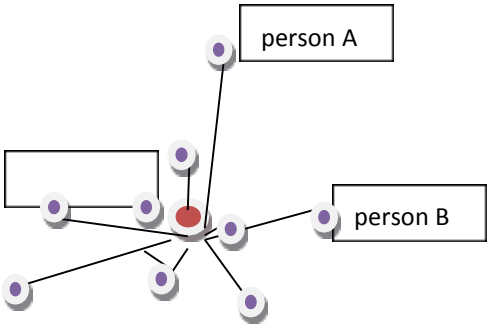
...so do practise using your more creative side.

Whom are we writing to?

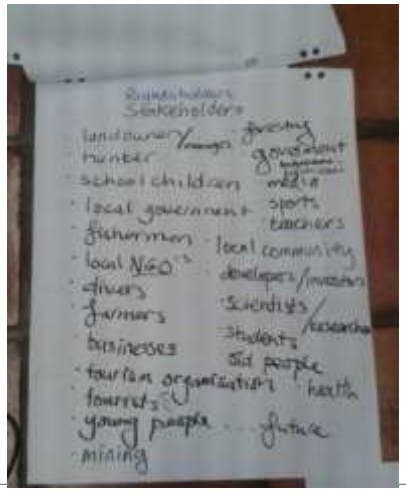
A N2000 contact map

In our lives we interact with many different people. Some on a daily basis, family, work colleagues, other with different degrees of regularity. Make a contact map of people you interact with.

In the centre of a piece of paper make a circle that represents YOU. Draw lines coming out of the centre representing the people you interact with the short the line the closer and more often you are in contact with that person.



Count up the number of people you are in contact with. Add up the total for everyone in the room! It's a lot!! Especially if you then consider the contact maps of these people. The power of word of mouth which is the basis for social media! Think of the effect of you passed positive biodiversity or N2000 information to everyone on your contact map....



You communicate with all of those on your contact map to varying degrees and in different ways. Each of us will have at least 20 regular contacts, much more if you include those on the very edges of our map. Many of these, in a work context, will be stakeholders in our N2000 communications.

Thinking specifically about a work situation, list the different people you engage with either as work colleagues, or stakeholders in your site. Think about how you communicate with these people and groups in the most effective way, in term of

what information they need and in what form they need it in.Share with the group any you think were particularly well received and effective.

CHECK ANNEX II FOR EXERCISES

The Three Essential Elements of Good Writing

This is true whether you are writing a technical paper or a piece of creative writing.

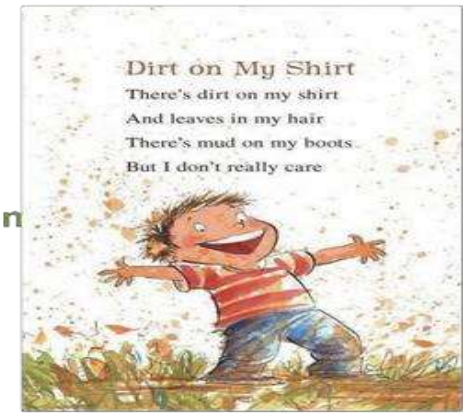
a) The Structure of your writing

This ensures your writing is logical and well presented. In some technical, scientific and legal writing there are accepted structures, however for most writing the writer can use different structures to order and sequence the message.

Structure
way content is presented

Style
way content is written

Content
what you are writing about

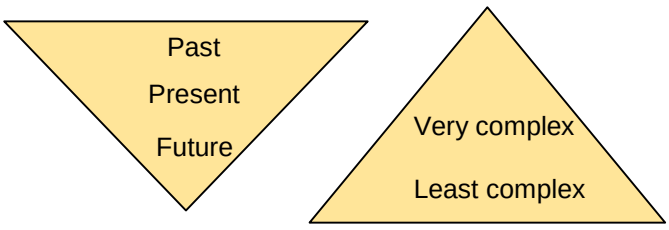


Clarity, Brevity, Simplicity, Humanity, Authenticity

A writer could order their thoughts according **to time**, what happened in the past, what is happening now, and what will come next. Or what is the earliest event --->latest event. This could be used when writing about plant or animal life, weather, life cycles, or any cultural story.

Alternatively the order could be reversed. This structure also work geographically, with degrees of complexity or spatially.

Try varying the structure. See if that improves the information you are trying to impart. People remember more the first and last things they read...So make it worth it!!



b) The Style and Content

Already it has been identified that N2000 manager may write in technical and scientific styles and creative style but mist often in a creative factual style. There are differing "rules" and guidelines for technical writing and creative writing.

Regardless of what is being written - Remember 5 simple test of good writing

- **Clarity** - know what you want to say and say it clearly and well
- **Brevity** - be concise. Less is more
- **Simplicity** - avoid jargon, buzzwords and long sentences and overly technical and scientific language
- **Humanity** – make sure it relates to your audience
- **Authenticity – believe in what you are writing**

Be also aware that you may completely understand what you are writing about...but your audience may not. Be clear and avoid dense language, such as the examples shown.

Long complex sentences

Existing is being unique. Existence, reality, essence, cause, or truth is uniqueness. The geometric point in the centre of the sphere is nature's symbol of the immeasurable uniqueness within its measurable effect. A centre is always unique; otherwise it would not be a centre. Because uniqueness is reality, or that which makes a thing what it is, everything that is real is based on a centralization.

Density

Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns ; there are things we know we know. We also know knowns ; there are things we know we know. We also know some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns -- the ones we don't know we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones.

Donald Rumsfield

Often N2000 material tends towards technical and obscure language. However all is not lost, as we can learn and practise to rewrite and rephrase to improve the clarity, brevity and simplicity of the writing.

More tips on style and content

- **Avoid writing as you speak.**
  When we speak it tends to be very convoluted and complex with qualifications and various adoring phrases, usually grammatically incorrect to conform to the way the mind listen Also there is tone, emphasis and body language and facial expressions which aid understanding all of which are all lost in writing. The mind reads differently. It needs simple, straightforward sentences.
- **Strive for brevity.**
  Every word is money. Money to write, to print to read and translate. It also makes understanding better. But balance brevity with completeness. Don't reduce so much that meaning is lost.
- **Simple short sentences.**
  If you find you are using a second, or third comma, think if it should become two sentences instead of one long one. Keep it simple. Subject Verb Object.
- **Always check spelling, grammar and punctuation.**
- **Don't rely only on spell check.**
- **Avoid repetition.**
- **Do not be satisfied with the 1st draft.** Redraft and redraft again. GIVE IT A REST.
  Sleep on it. Take a break from the writing. It will always be easier to work on after a break.
- **Read it our loud.**
  If you can't breathe...your sentences are too long, and you will soon notice if it doesn't make sense.

SOME (humorous) Writing TIPS

1. **Do not get side-tracked.** If onions are the most consumed vegetable in the world, why are fire engines red?
2. Avoid starting sentences with a non-specific pronoun. **It is** not a good way to begin.
3. Prepositions are words you should not end sentences **with.**
4. Avoid clichés **like the plague**. Now ain't that the **pot calling the kettle black**.
5. Keep away from ampersands & abbreviations, **etc.** within the body of the text.
6. Parenthetical remarks are unnecessary **(and should be avoided).**
7. It is wrong **to ever split** an infinitive.
8. Contractions should**n't** appear in your paper.
9. Foreign words and phrases are not **apropos or chic.**
10. Like most people, **one should never generalize.**
11. Eliminate quotations. As Mark Twain once said: **"Quoting the witticisms of others only shows the lack of quotable wit."**
12. Comparisons **are as bad as** clichés.
13. Do not be redundant; do not use more words than necessary**; it is very excessive.**
14. Profanity **sucks.**
15. Be **more or less** specific.
16. Understatement is **always** best.
17. Exaggeration **is a million times** worse than understatement.
18. Can I use one-word sentences? **No**.
19. Analogies in writing are like **feathers on a snake.**
20. The passive voice is to be avoided.
21. **Go around the barn at high noon** to avoid jargon or gibberish.
22. Who needs **rhetorical questions?**
23. Be careful to use apostrophes correctly.
24. Do not use **them** pronouns as modifiers.
25. **And** never start a sentence with a conjunction. **And, but, and or will** not get you very far.

6.2 TECHNICAL WRITING

Technical writing is probably the style of writing most people in N2000 and protected areas do most often. Reports, funding applications, scientific papers, plans and strategies are most often written in this style. There are certain styles that are acceptable for the specific audiences who requires this kind of material. Although this may be appropriate in these circumstances it is generally NOT a style that is accessible to the majority of protected area stakeholders or visitors. It is important to be able to distinguish this style and be able to shift from technical to creative and back again!

One of the most common elements of technical writing is writing objectives.

Writing Objectives[2]

The most important questions to ask yourself when writing objectives are:

- Who is involved? Or even who is the action for?
- What are the desired outcomes or immediate outputs?
- When will the outcome occur?
- How will progress be measured?

2 Writing objectives adapted from Heriot-Watt University Performance and Development Review Handbook Version 1.0 August 2008 © Heriot-Watt University.

These form the basis of SMART: Specific -Measurable -Attainable -Realistic -Timebound

Specific

Objectives should clearly state what you are expected to achieve, using action verbs to describe what has to be done. For example:

- *Not specific: Encourage more people to visit the Park*
- *Specific: Increase park visitation*
- *Not specific: Conduct research....*
- *Specific: Formulate plans for research on.....*

Measurable

Objectives should include a quality and/or quantity reference so that you can measure whether or not you have achieved them. For example:

- *Not measurable: Increase visitation of the Park*
- *Measurable: Increase park visitation by 10%*
- *Not measurable: Formulate plans for research on.....*
- *Measurable: Formulate plans for research on topic X and submit grant application to X Research Council.*

Agreed

Objectives should be relevant and appropriate to the project/plan/strategy.

Realistic

Objectives should be challenging but achievable i.e. they should not be unrealistic. For example, it might be realistic to plan to lose 10 pounds in weight but it would be unrealistic to plan to lose 10 pounds in one week. Objectives should also take account of the skills, knowledge and resources needed to achieve them.

Timebound

Objectives should include a time reference, such as a specific deadline. *For example:*

- *Not timebound: Increase membership of the Sports Centre by 10%*
- *Timebound: Increase membership of the Sports Centre by 10% over the next six months;*
- *Not timebound: Formulate plans for research on topic X and submit grant application to X Research Council.*
- *Timebound: Formulate plans for research on topic X and submit grant application to X Research Council by 1 June 2015.*

The time reference for other objectives might be in terms of frequency or turnaround time. For example:

- *Timebound: Once a month, update all library web pages and printed guides*
- *Timebound: Circulate minutes of Committee Y within five days of the meeting*

If there is a particularly long timescale involved, you may need to break your objective down, identify the steps you need to take to achieve your overall objective and work out how long each step is likely to take so that you can agree a target date.

However we are often stuck for the right combination of words to describe what we are trying to achieve .For this the **Thesaurus** is your FRIEND! Use liberally! The table below gives you some example of verbs you can use in most objective writing.

Knowledge

Count, Define, Describe, Draw, Enumerate, Find, Identify, Label, List, Match, Name, Quote, Read, Recall, Recite, Record, Reproduce, Select, Sequence, State, Tell, View, Write

Comprehend

Classify, Cite, Conclude, Convert, Describe, Discuss, Estimate, Explain, Generalize, Give examples, Illustrate, Interpret, Locate, Make, sense of, Paraphrase, Predict, Report, Restate, Review, Summarize, Trace, Understand

Analyse

Break down, Characterize, Classify, Compare, Contrast, Correlate, Debate, Deduce, Diagram, Differentiate, Discriminate, Distinguish, Examine, Focus, Illustrate, Infer, Limit, Outline, Point out, Prioritize, Recognize, Research, Relate, Separate, Subdivide

Synthesize

Adapt, Anticipate, Categorize, Collaborate, Combine, Communicate, Compare, Compile, Compose, Construct, Contrast, Create, Design, Develop, Devise, Express, Facilitate, Formulate, Generate, Incorporate, Individualize, Initiate, Integrate, Intervene, Invent, Make up, Model, Modify, Negotiate, Organize, Perform, Plan, Pretend, Produce, Progress, Propose, Rearrange, Reconstruct, Reinforce, Reorganize, Revise, Rewrite, Structure, Substitute, Validate

Evaluate

Appraise, Argue, Assess, Choose, Compare & Contrast, Conclude, Criticize, Critique, Decide, Defend, Evaluate, Interpret, Judge, Justify, Predict, Prioritize, Prove, Rank, Rate, Reframe, Select, Support

Apply

Act, Administer, Articulate, Assess, Change, Chart, Choose, Collect, Compute, Construct, Contribute, Control, Demonstrate, Determine, Develop, Discover, Dramatize, Draw, Establish, Extend, Imitate, Implement, Interview, Include, Inform, Instruct, Paint, Participate, Predict, Prepare, Produce, Provide, Relate, Report, Select, Show, Solve, Transfer, Use, Utilize

Technical Writing - General Tips

- do not adopt a "personal" style. Writing a technical paper is not fiction
- always write in the passive voice
- do not use possessives (mine. ours theirs)
- be consistent. If you capitalise nouns then do so throughout
- do not use contractions (e.g. don't)
- use agreed structures and order, especially in research and scientific papers
- in project proposals, write the introduction LAST
- leave the Title until the end. it should be the objective of the project "rearranged"
- methods should be written in the future tense results in the past tense.
- Check correct for of singulars and plurals....g data, media
- avoid starting sentences with prepositions... to, in, on, in order to , during
- avoid the use of / , instead use and , or
- never use superlatives
- never use very
- be careful using "via".... it means by way of, e.g. Munich to Madrid via Amsterdam. Not by means of i.e. a mode of travel. Munich to Amsterdam via plane.
- be careful using "due to", it means attributable to or caused by, never because of.

6.3 CREATIVE WRITING

Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

Freeman Tilden

Interpretation is primarily a communication process that helps people make sense of and understand more about the N2000 site. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation. Interpretation is most often used in nature centres, interpretation boards, given during guided walks, talks and presentations, displays,arts work and many other events and means of sharing information. The art of interpretation is fundamental to sharing positive information about N2000 sites and to inspire those visiting to feel allegiance to the place and act positively, constructively and sustainably.

Writing Interpretation

"Too often writing is seen as unimportant, something done in a spare half-hour. Writing which commands attention and is memorable is hard work."[3]

The best text tells a story and uses a range of creative techniques to bring a site or object to life. Writing interpretive text is a skill that requires thought and practice. The following guidelines will help you with this.

Amount of text

There is nothing more off-putting than too many words on a panel or a leaflet As a guideline, an interpretive panel should contain a maximum of 200 words. Publications can contain more text, but no page should have more than half its space taken up with writing.

Word and sentence length

Interpretation must help visitors find interesting stories and ideas quickly. Try writing in shorter sentences, and use short, everyday words. This makes text easier to read. Keep it short and simple!

Writing style

It is very important that your text relates to your audience. This is one of the key things that differentiates interpretation from visitor information. There are a number of writing techniques that will help your text relate to your audience:

- Address the reader in the first person - This mean referring to them as 'you', for example:

'You can see the lichen clinging to the trees, taking in water and nutrients from the air'

Use active rather than passive verbs

This makes the text sound more natural and lively.

For example, *'we manage…'* is far better than *'this site is managed by…'***Use metaphors, analogies and comparisons**

These help people relate what you're telling them to something else they know about.

For example: *'Loch Ness is so deep it could fit in 100 Nelson's Columns, one on top of the other'* And

'Jays are a bit like us. When we're hungry, we pop to the fridge for some food we bought earlier. When Jays are hungry, they dig up an acorn they buried earlier

3 J Carter [1], 1993) http://www.jamescarter.cc/

Use humour

Humour can be a very effective way of relating to and engaging your audience, but be careful: not everyone finds the same thing funny. Use humour, but with care.

Ask questions and engage your audience's imagination

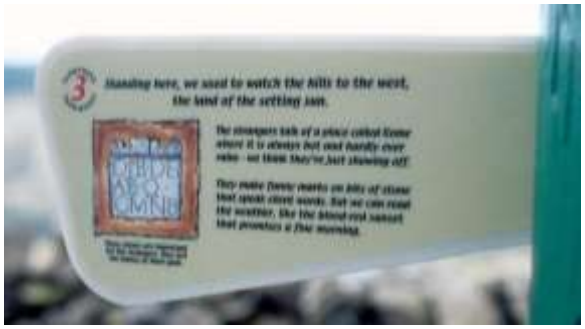
Your text can ask specific questions and get your audience to imagine things.

- For example: *'What famous drink comes from this innocent looking bush?'* And
  'Can you imagine living here during the Clearances when your whole village was thrown off its land?'

Use first person narrative

It can be very effective to adopt a character to narrate your story. This means your interpretive text is written in the first person. *A good example of this is given below and comes from a cycle trail in Glentress Forest near Peebles:*

The swingpost is parto f a trail exploring iron-age site. The interpreters developed characters to narrate a story to help visitors explore and enjoy the trail.



Design and Illustration © Ross Associates

Write in short sentences and paragraphs

Long sentences and paragraphs that go on ando n are so off putting that most people won't even bother to begin Reading them or will be so bored halfway through they will find something more interesting to do instead.

Avoid jargon and technical terms

Jargon and technical terms will confuse or alienate the reader. Please use plain English.

Illustrations

Pictures are often far better at communicating than words.

For example, *how would you describe an ammonite? Well, it's a fossil cephalopod of the order Ammonidea with a flat spiral shell…1 Don't be silly! It's far better to draw one.*

Reading age

The concept of 'reading age' can be a useful way to check how easy your writing is to understand. In general, a 'reading age' of about12 is a good level at which to write your text, but it is not an absolute standard.

This does not mean that all your visitors are about 12 years old – it's simply a standardised measure for how complex a text is to read. School teachers sometimes use reading age measures to match texts to their students' abilities The reading age of tabloid newspapers is around 9-12. Their writing uses very few technical or scientific terms, and is easily understood by the great majority of older children and adults.

You can find out more about reading age and how to measure it in the A Way With Words edition of the Environmental Interpretation bulletin. See A Way with Words journal, CEI, 1993

Other points to check

- Only use one idea per sentence. If you have two ideas, use two sentences.
- Vary the length of sentences for better rhythm.
- Read your sentence and if you're in doubt, punctuate it. When you're happy with your punctuation, don't use more.
- Look out for potentially loaded words. These show bias and can make the reader take a contrary stance on principle. For example, 'people' and 'we' is far better than 'man', 'woman', 'him' or 'her'.
- Clichés make people switch off as they think they know what the sentence will say before they finish reading it. There are 'far reaching consequences' of using clichés

6.4 EDITING

Whatever sort of writing you do, it's important to revise and edit your work. However much time you took over the piece on the first draft, you'll always find a few mistakes to correct and improvements that can be made. An editing exercise can also be found in Annex II.



CHECK ANNEX II FOR EXERCISES

Editing tips

- **STEP AWAY...** Leave it Alone. Do nothing . Leave your work, overnight at least, for a day if possible. It will read and "feel" completely different and enable you to look with fresh eyes. This is THE most important editing task you can do!
- **Read over** your whole piece on one sitting. This will enable you to check that it has a good "flow", is logical and can be understood in its entirety.
- **Print out** the first draft, and read through the whole thing. Circle any typos or mistakes that you notice.
- **Look out for:**
- Typos and misspellings READ BACKWARDS...You are forced to go slowly, focussing on every individual word.
- Reading your work our loud as this will soon identify clumsy sentences and confusing or misleading phrasing.
- Unnecessary words, repetition, overuse of words etc check for Five Words You Can Cut. http://www.dailywritingtips.com/five-words-you-can-cut/
- **Rewrite any parts** that don't make sense or can be made clearer, shorten long phrases, sentences and paragraphs. Subject. Verb. Object. Be ruthless. Less is MORE.
- Depending on what is being written, think if bullet points, illustrations or tables can be used to elaborate or clarify the text.

After you've done this, ask a colleague to read the piece either for understanding or for proofreading. Proofreading requires a detailed look at the work, checking for spelling,typos spacing and formatting.

Some tips do edit your work – spell check and save



CHECK ANNEX III FOR EXERCISE

However online spell check is not full proof. Read aloud the following. It "sounds" correct and spell check will pass it as "correct"…but is it.?

The Spelling Chequer (or poet tree without mist takes)

Eye have a spelling chequer It
came with my pea sea
it plainly makrs four my revue Miss
steaks eye cannot see

Each thyme when I have struct the quays Eye
weight four it two say
if watt eye rote is wrong or rite It
shows me strait a weight

As soon as a misct ache is maid It
Nose bee fore too late
And eye can out the error rite
Eye
Really fined it grate

I've run this poem threw it I'm sure
Your policed to no it's letter
perfect in its weight My chequer
tolled me sew.
Author Unknown

Editing Summary

Categories	Things to Look For	Examples
Content	- Accuracy - Weak arguments	- Outdated information - Points with little supporting data
Structure	- Poor organization - Support for your thesis - Sentence order	- Points that aren't in a logical order - Insufficient evidence - Points that fit better in a different paragraph
Style	- Tone - Inconsistencies - Clarity	- Too formal or casual for the audience - Changes in point-of-view or tone - Awkward wording or lengthy sentences
Citations	- Proper accreditation - Proper format	- Failure to cite a source when needed - Sources cited in the correct style
Misspellings	- Misspelled words - Wrong word choice	- Commonly misspelled words - Words spelled correctly, but used incorrectly
Incorrect grammar	- Improper use of homophones - Pronoun use	- To, too, two - Who and whom
Punctuation	- Correct usage - Appropriateness	- Quotations and citations - Contractions do not belong in formal writing