

EDITING AN ESSAY: A BASIC CHECKLIST

Opening

- first paragraph includes a clear thesis statement
- opening discussion leaves the reader with a good idea of the subject and scope of my essay
- opening touches briefly on the major points that will be raised later

Body

- the body of the essay forms a structured line of argument supporting my thesis
- each paragraph has a topic sentence that indicates its overall main point
- each paragraph makes a single point, and all details in help to support or explain this point

Conclusion

- the reader is reminded of my thesis and main points
- there is a well developed closing discussion about what my essay has proved

Language

- the style of language is suitable (usually this means no slang, abbreviations, no contractions)
- phrasing is clear and concise, without repetitions or awkward passages
- spelling and word usage have been checked

Sentences and Punctuation

- all my sentences are complete (sentence fragments have been eliminated)
- run-on sentences (two or more sentences written as one) have been corrected
- punctuation has been checked, with special attention to commas

Grammar

- the essay has been read through with special attention to grammar
- pronoun agreement and subject-verb agreement have been checked
- all verbs are in the right tense, without any unnecessary tense shifts
- possessives are correctly formed, with apostrophes in place

Mechanics

- all proper nouns, titles, and headings are capitalized
- titles of brief works (essays, articles, short stories, etc.) are in quotation marks
- titles of books, plays, newspapers, magazines, etc. are in italics or underlined
- quotations are properly indicated (brief ones in quotation marks, long ones set off and indented)

COMMON FAULTS AFFECTING STUDENT ESSAYS

Content

- Undeveloped opening paragraph: just a thesis without any discussion, without any overview of the essay's main points
- Paragraphs that open with a detail instead of a comprehensive topic sentence
- Paragraphs that drift off the topic, or that include several main ideas
- Quotations that are simply 'stuck in'—not smoothly integrated into the essay, and/or not properly discussed or explained
- Undeveloped conclusions: a sentence or two instead of an effective, interesting closing discussion

Writing Style

- Awkward phrasing: cases in which there is a clearer, more straightforward way to make your point or a better way to organize a sentence.
- Wordiness (too many words where fewer would be more effective), unnecessary words and phrases that should have been edited out, repetition and redundancies.
- Two or more sentences written as one (run-on sentences or comma splices). In many cases, the problem is a comma placed where a period or semicolon is needed.
- Tense shifts: e.g. switching back and forth from present to past for no reason
- Careless errors in word usage (e.g. *there* in place of *their*, *were* for *where*, *than* for *then*). These can be missed due to reliance on spell-check systems as a substitute for proofreading.
- Apostrophe errors, usually in forming possessives (*society's problems*; *two students' work*)
- Faults in agreement involving pronouns (e.g. *one student submitted ~~their~~ her paper early*; *someone lost ~~their~~ his wallet*)
- Errors in subject-verb agreement (e.g. *neither of them ~~want~~ wants to do it*; *many newspapers including *The Gazette* ~~is~~ are published daily*)
- Faults in parallelism: every item in a list should be in the same form (e.g. *She enjoys skating, skiing, and ~~her snowboard~~ snowboarding*)

Note: If you have difficulty understanding or recognizing any of these errors, visit the Academic Skills Centre for assistance.