

'Bare bones' editing checklist

This quick guide lists some common problems faced when editing and offers solutions for fixing them.

Problem	Check	Aim	Solution
Illogical structure	Look at the table of contents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are chapters or sections of similar length and structure? Do divisions of content (into parts, chapters, etc) make sense? 	Logical structure that is easy to follow	Restructure as necessary to provide logical flow
Headings overused, underused or not appropriate	Check headings; look for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> too many levels (maximum of 5) too few headings (i.e. slabs of text >250 words with no subheadings) nonparallel structure headings that do not reflect the content 	Headings used in a way that helps reader to follow document	Revise headings as appropriate (e.g. if there are 6 or 7 heading levels, fix by restructuring the text)
Too many tables or figures	Scan document. Are there large numbers of tables or figures breaking up the text?	Text flowing, easy to follow	Move tables and figures to appendixes, as appropriate
Lack of linking text	Does each chapter or section have introductory text? Is there text to link different sections, put subsections into context, etc?	Document easy to follow, with parts clearly linked	Add linking text, where appropriate
Long sentences	Highlight a series of sentences and use the 'word count' feature in Word to check length	Average length of 14–18 words	Find long sentences that can be broken up (e.g. a semicolon becomes a full stop, a list becomes bullet points)
Overcapitalisation	Scan a couple of pages. Are there many capitals within sentences? Are they used consistently?	Consistency and minimal capitalisation	Identify words that are incorrectly capitalised; fix using 'Find and replace'
Bullet lists not making sense, too long or not parallel	Find bullet points; look at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> lead-in sentence (makes sense?) number of points (not too many?) first word of each point (parallel?) 	Each point following from lead-in sentence, 3–6 points, parallel structure	Change either lead-in sentence or bullets to make sense; break up if too many points; make parallel
Overuse of passive voice	Use the Word proofing setting for checking passive sentences (In Microsoft Office 365: File > Options > Proofing > Settings, Passive Voice)	Maximum of 40% passive (as in normal speech)	Activate sentences where possible
Other grammatical problems	Check appropriate items in Word > Proofing (as for passive voice) and look for blue underlining	Fluent text that is easy to read and understand	Reword sentences as appropriate, following prompts from Word
Technical inconsistency	Scan a few pages with technical terms, units, chemical names, etc; are there inconsistencies?	Accuracy and consistency	Edit technical terms, units, chemical names, etc to be consistent