



10 tips for better proofreading and copy editing

Erin L. Boyle

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Why this matters



(Though you probably already know why well enough)

I opened the webcast with a story:

Two years ago, another writer and I were covering a medical conference in India, and we were a crew of 2 writers/editors putting out a daily 12-page printed newspaper for the attendees.

One day, we rushed through our 5 pm copy deadline and then our 8 pm press deadline, copy editing and proofing the articles we had just written.

The next morning, I saw the printed newspaper onsite, and took one for myself. I looked at the front page and saw...

DailyNews
Friday Hyderabad 2013

The official show daily of APAO-AIOS 2013 Hyderabad

**President of India make appearance
at Opening Ceremony**

By Erin L. Doyle EyeWorld Senior Staff Writer

With India President Pranab Shri Mukherjee and other attendee dignitaries lighting a lamp in an official ceremony to kick-off the 28th APAO Congress, the meeting got off to a start with a well-attended Opening Ceremony that showcased the richness of Indian culture and history.

"Ophthalmologists have a special and important status in society," said President Mukherjee. "You are the ones who, by being doctors, are a critical human organ that is necessary for the conduct of human affairs and pursuit of quality of life. According to the ancient Indian scriptures, the eye is the most important of senses in our body."

ICO, AAO, SAAO and other organization officials discussed the future of ophthalmology and its need to address the rising tide of blindness around the world. He launched the digital inauguration of the meeting, a festival of lights and colorful videos, with traditional Indian music highlighting the meeting location in Hyderabad.

President Mukherjee said ophthalmologists have a vital contribution to make in reducing global blindness.

Frank J. Martin, M.D., Australia, outgoing president of the APAO, said this year's Congress should be an excellent place for attendees to learn.

"We come together at this Con-



This. A mistake in the headline, top-fold. I wanted to go up to all the people carrying the newspaper around me and apologize, telling them I was so sorry I missed the "s."
So this webcast was designed to share a few of the tips I've learned over the years from amazing mentors and editors, to avoid just this kind of experience.

Who I am

I'm a writer. An editor. A speaker. And someone who loves details. I've been in medical writing/editing for 10 years now, specializing in eyes and women's health.

Before that, I paid my dues as a newspaper reporter in New Jersey, covering a wide range of topics before falling into medical reporting and loving it.



○As editors, we're busy.

So here are 10 tips to help you copy edit and proofread like a boss.

Tip 1:

Print it out or highlight onscreen

- Reading on the screen and paper are not the same. Printing can be key in finding mistakes. If you can't print out the text because a printer is unavailable or the text is entirely digital, highlighting text in sections can help, as can anything that defines the text as separate and helps errors stand out, such as reading the text once and then changing the font and reading it again, or changing font size for headlines and text body.

Tip 2: Read aloud

- Read aloud and/or sound out each word (especially for front-page headlines). This can be invaluable for finding errors, words that do not belong, and sentences that do not make sense, especially for digital or on-screen editing. It might sound a little odd to be reading aloud, but reading the words without speaking or in a low voice can work.

Tip 3: Take care with quotes

- Quotes can be tricky. They can be missing words or punctuation. Our natural inclination (and maybe desire?) is to skim these when proofreading or line editing, but don't. Read through carefully.

Tip 4:

Edit in parts

- Read through the document, and then concentrate on separate parts, looking specifically for those parts and nothing else. For example, look through to ensure all the correct punctuation is there – every sentence (including captions and pull quotes) has a period, every colon follows your house style rules, every quote has quotation marks starting and ending quotes. Then look through for capital letters starting sentences. Then look through for house style. Then look through for page numbers. Then look through for the month. Then look through to ensure numbers match (see next tip).

Tip 5:

Add up the numbers

- If the text includes percentages and numbers that add up to 100, make sure that you add them before you include them. (But don't do this when tired on a Friday afternoon. I recently added 5% when I totaled a pie chart and asked the source why this was wrong, only to have her point out my mistake.)

Tip 6:

Know your writers' problem areas

- Writers will often make the same style errors repeatedly, and if you work with a team of writers, you can often catch reoccurring mistakes and ask them to fix those errors into the future. I ask writers to change one major error at a time, because I've found when sending back proofed text with multiple changes, they don't always change all of the errors in their next story. Focus on the big picture repeated errors, and kindly ask writers to change those, and they typically do.

Tip 7:

Know *your* problem areas

- What areas have you always struggled with? We all have problem areas. Maybe it's just that – the difference between its and it's is tough for you to spot. Or maybe on Friday afternoons you shouldn't be adding pie chart percentages. Maybe you can't spell certain words, never remember certain grammar rules, or have certain meanings you've always tripped up on (except/accept slipped by me for years in my own writing). It's OK. You don't need to be perfect. You just need to be good (and aware).

Tip 8:

Stick to your style guide(s)

- You know what your style guide is (house only, combination of guides, just one guide). Know it and use it. Stay consistent with your guide whenever possible, and when you stray, go to your house guide and make a note. That need to stray might come up again, and you'll need to remember why and how you dealt with it. Editing is consistency in action, and style guides set the rules for that consistency. (Note on style guides: Make sure to stay up-to-date on the big changes from guide to guide).

Tip 9:

If you don't know, ask.

- But if you still don't know, it goes. Don't put a mistake in the text by adding punctuation or grammar if you're not sure it belongs, or do substantial editing on clinical or scientific text that changes the context of the text without first discussing with the writer. If you're unsure something belongs, research it or ask the writer. Refreshers on commas and word usage can be helpful. But if numbers aren't adding up, the text doesn't make sense, or an error in a quote is too big to let stand, my thought is, if you're on deadline and can't discuss with the author, use your editorial powers and sense, and cut it. I would rather run another story with additional information than run a story that needs a retraction.

Tip 10:

Let it rest, if possible

- This is not always possible, but if you can, step away from your writing or the piece that you are editing. You will likely find more mistakes and ways to change the text for the better.

Bonus: Proof Checklist

Proof Checklist

Cover

- Check headlines, page numbers match
- Check TOC is correct amount of pages
- Check company logo is in bottom left-hand side
- Check month, date, volume number

TOC

- Check all pages, articles, headlines (including stories inside), and photos match
- Check the correct cover photo is cited

Throughout issue

- Check that headline for feature cover section matches, including on front cover
- Check that month and date is correct throughout the book
- Check that sections names match
- Proof special sections
- Proof any fillers, side bars
- Proof sidebars for feature covers
- Proof masthead

Each story

- Headline
- Deck
- Header
- Byline for correct name
- Lede
- Spacing
- Pull quotes
- Images, captions
- Slides, adding stats up so they equal 100%
- Read text
- Double-check any phone numbers, web sites listed in stories
- Look at physicians' names, double-check if unsure of correct spelling
- Ensure all doctors' names are bolded
- Jumps (page #, wording)
- Editors' note/financial disclosure
- Contact information

10 tips for better proofreading and copy editing

1. Print it out OR highlight onscreen
2. Read aloud and/or sound out each word
3. Take care with quotes
4. Edit in parts
5. Add up the numbers
6. Note repeated errors by writers
7. Know *your* problem areas
8. Stick to your style guide(s)
9. If you don't know, ask. If you still don't know, it goes.
10. Let it rest overnight, if possible.

How to contact me

Connect with me on LinkedIn through this account and email:

www.linkedin.com/in/erinlynnboyle/

erinlynnboyle@yahoo.com

Other resources

-EditTeach.org (has varied resources for the copy editor, including "The 10 commandments of the copy editor" and study tools)

<http://www.editteach.org/>

-UNC College of Arts & Sciences "Editing and Proofreading" handout (has great tips on copy editing and proofreading in 6-page handout)

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/editing-and-proofreading/>

-Comma Queen (Mary Norris, a New Yorker copy editor, has four fun videos on copy editing)

<http://video.newyorker.com/series/comma-queen>

-Grammar Girl (Mignon Fogarty has great info/grammar tips)

<http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl>

-The American Copy Editors Society (resources on copy editing)

<http://www.copydesk.org/>

-Mark Allen Editorial (some great resources for copy editing, style books and usage guides from 2011)

<http://markallenediting.com/2011/05/03/freelancerresources/>

-And for those using the AP style book, the new 2015 edition is out

<https://twitter.com/APStylebook>

Q&A

On the live webcast, we had a great Q&A. Questions included:

Do you proof on paper every time?

No, I don't. I proof on paper when I can—time permitting, printer available—and for those documents that I copy edit/proof on the screen, I either highlight the text or change the font size, or I read aloud, slowly, sounding out the headlines on the front pages of deadline documents.

What kind of document do you use for your in-house style guide, and how do you update it?

Our in-house style guide is in a Word document, so I can regularly go into it and make changes or update information. I also have a smaller checklist guide that I update and send, as a PDF, to new writers. I convert the in-house guide to a PDF whenever I send it, but I find that being able to change the document regularly with a Word file is most useful for me.

Do you use this same proof checklist for digital offerings, or do you change it?

I change it. Each offering can have its own checklist for the most vital aspects to remember (for instance, an e-newsletter might need different proofing than a print publication because of the nature of the document). Proofing galleys can include a lot of details to remember, especially for bigger publications, so having a checklist to follow at proofing time can be invaluable.

How often do you fact check?

I fact check on an as-needed basis. I've been in the same field for a decade, so have developed a deep knowledge in the topic and use that to my advantage. When I see information that looks suspicious (source's name doesn't look correct, all websites, phone numbers, etc), I fact check.

Q&A continued

Do you use a single quotation mark ‘ or double “ in headlines?

This is a discussion I've had with colleagues. We use a single quotation mark, in both headlines and headers. It's one of those things I've always done, but never looked into why. It's been the standard at all the publications I've worked for, for the last 10 years. Someone on the webcast told us that it's AP style, which I was not surprised to hear - I've worked at places that embraced AP, so it's in keeping with that. I was surprised though that I didn't know that, in a way - and in a way, not. I think this signals that I need a refresher course on AP, which I use on a daily basis but know now as a language. And like a language, you don't always know why you do something, you just do it. I also learned during the webcast that the amount for an online AP account is inexpensive - I never had time to look into it (and I'm ashamed to say, we've been using style guides in my office from 2013) and always suspected it must be over budget. But now I know it isn't, which is great.

What is the difference between copy editing and proofreading?

I answered this question off the top of my head, with my understanding of the two from 10 years in the medical publishing industry - copy editing is all the editing of the text, substantial and grammatical. Proofreading is reading the final proofs of the publication, in either paper or digital form. I do both on a monthly basis for a print publication, and sometimes daily for digital offerings. After the webcast, I had a chance to look it up, and here are the official definitions:

copy·ed·it

edit (text to be printed) by checking its consistency and accuracy.

proof·read

read (printer's proofs or other written or printed material) and mark any errors.