

Colour Coded for Success

PAUSES N' PERIODS – EDITING LIFE INTO YOUR LETTERS | *Key to Business Writing Series*

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GOOD WRITING CONNECTS with the reader. It can be viewed any number of times and lasts a long time. It represents you, your product or service when you are not there to do it personally.

The content you send out should therefore, reflect you well – whether you are writing for reasons of business or pleasure. In our last installment we looked at revising the content portion of your document.

Today, let's look at some editing tips – when you scan your text for language use and technicalities. Spoken communication has nuances, gestures, tone and body language. Punctuation and sentence structure fills in all that in when you write.

Punctuation Starter Pack

Punctuation elements used most often to control the pacing and help the reader 'hear' you are:

Period (.) indicates a full stop and comes at the end of a sentence, or an abbreviation.

Comma (,) is used to separate thoughts within a sentence, particularly in longer sentences. Think of a comma as a breath.

The Colon (:) is used with a subheading or to introduce a list, a quote, or a statement. What follows then is an explanation of what came before it.

The Semicolon (;) is treated as if it was a period. This means there must be a complete thought (i.e. the equivalent of a complete sentence) on either side of a semicolon.

Beyond Dots and Dashes

Question and exclamation marks, items in quotations and ideas separated by dashes create visual interest and variety to your collection of simple sentences.

Consult a style guide to answer questions you might have on punctuation and to have help in editing while you work. A classic is *Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. & E.B. White. People who studied English as a second language might be familiar with Betty Azar's very useful books on grammar.

Write fearlessly. Do not let doubts on the dashes and dots slow you down. Your editing time is designed to clean it all up.

DO pay this attention to your sentences:

- follow proper word order rules
- ensure there is a subject and a predicate
- use a variety of verb tenses correctly and appropriately
- be careful of subject-verb agreements

Using a variety of language constructions makes your writing more precise and educated. If you are unsure, don't get lazy – look up the meaning or spelling of a word. A side benefit of doing this is to pump up your vocabulary and word power – forever.

Editing is only one part of your writing success. Experts suggest you budget your time and create an effective writing habit with this formula:

- Planning: 20% of time
- Writing: 30% of time
- Revising: 45% of time
- Evaluating: 5% of time

Proofread, try and pinpoint mistakes reading the text from bottom of the page up – Yes! Backwards. Then read it out loud, and if you have the opportunity let others read it. Take the role of researcher and judge the material not yourself.

More Tips to help you EDIT EDIT EDIT

Rules to Writing Success:

- Decrease sentence length
- Avoid stuffy language
- Omit needless words
- Use strong verbs

Omit:

- Needless words
- Empty words and phrases
- Redundancies
- Clichés
- Expletives
- Repetition

VIP – Your very important point is to look at balance. A strictly edited document might be grammatically correct, but not interesting or even intelligible.

Helena is a Vancouver based business writer and communications trainer. To sign up for her 3x a month quick tips on writing and speaking delivered to your e-mail box, send your request to helena.writer@gmail.com Simply put 'Add me' in the subject line. As always, I invite you to send in your questions and comments to www.theafronews.ca.