

Words from Wordsworth

Welcome

The purpose of this newsletter, which is targeted to our clients and potential clients, is to answer your questions about grammar, punctuation, spelling, document processing, and general technical editing, as well as to provide an introduction to our services. Please call me at (907) 745-5674 or e-mail me at petnews@alaska.net if you have any questions or would like to see samples of our work. And send your questions for our next newsletter via e-mail, fax, or regular mail.—Lori Jo Oswald, Owner/
Managing Editor

Services Offered by Wordsworth

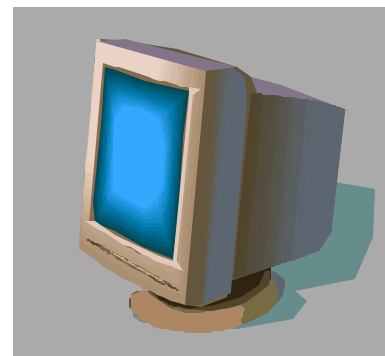
Wordsworth Writing, Editing, and Researching Services provides the following services to firms in Alaska:

- ◆ Technical editing and proofreading
- ◆ Technical, business, and proposal writing (including writing Statements of Qualification, web sites)
- ◆ Literature review and report researching and writing
- ◆ Document processing
- ◆ Newsletter writing and designing
- ◆ Web page writing and designing
- ◆ Workshop teaching on grammar, punctuation, style, editing, writing, and document formatting
- ◆ Style guide writing

Apostrophe Tips

Here are some tips on that mysterious little mark on your keyboard:

- Apostrophes are not used for plural forms of years and acronyms: 1990s, USTs.
- Apostrophes are used to show possession. The apostrophe precedes the “s” when the noun is singular; it follows the noun when the noun is plural. There is no need for a second “s” after the apostrophe (this is a style issue and will vary by style guide and company). Examples: the client’s bill, the clients’ bills, the USEPA’s decision, Robert Edwards’ letter.
- Its and it’s are often confused; its is the possessive form, and it’s is a contraction for it is. Examples: The agency believed its decision was correct. It’s not important.
- Do not use contractions (e.g, it’s, can’t, don’t, won’t, wouldn’t). They are too informal for professional writing.



Steps to Having Your Report Edited

1. Call Wordsworth at (907) 745-5674 (250-6530 in Anchorage).
2. E-mail your document to petnews@alaska.net.
3. Usually your report will be returned via e-mail with track changes (so that you can see what edits were made) within 24 hours.
4. If you would prefer hard copy edits only, fax your document to Wordsworth at 907-745-5677.

About Wordsworth Writing, Editing, and Researching Services

Wordsworth is owned by Lori Jo Oswald, Ph.D., who handles all the document editing, writing, and designing projects. She also handles most of the document formatting projects. Her on-call staff for large, rush projects includes three professional document processors with long-time experience in the environmental and engineering fields, two proofreaders (for cross-checking document changes only), a graphic artist, a photographer, and a web site designer.

Education, Lori Jo Oswald, Owner, Wordsworth

Ph.D. English, University of Oregon

M.A. English, University of Oregon

B.Mus., University of Alaska Anchorage (Minors: Journalism and English)

A.A. Social Science, Anchorage Community College

Additional College Coursework: Microsoft Word, Advanced Word, Excel, Advanced Excel, Proofreading, WordPerfect, Desktop Publishing, Advanced Desktop Publishing, Front Page, PageMaker

A list of some of Wordsworth’s clients can be found on page 4.

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The Monster in the Corner: What Is a Technical Editor?

by Lori Jo Oswald, Ph.D.

To some people, the technical editor is a mysterious creature, who lives in some sort of book-filled cave surrounded by dictionaries, editing manuals, style guides, old cups of coffee, and a bag of Hershey's kisses. Perhaps happy noises emit from the editor's office now and then, as she finds a particularly fascinating error. She prides herself on her acronym retention and keeps lists with strange names such as "Words NOT to Hyphenate."

Some fear going near this red-penned ink machine, but I am here to tell you that we are actually human. Odd humans, albeit, but human.

We are actually not your old school teachers (okay, some of us are), and we are not here to criticize you or make fun of you.

Instead, technical editors are people who love language. We love words. We love format. We love details. We are, in essence, a writer's best friends.

Even though there are times you will surely disagree with me, if you work for a company that has an in-house editor or two, you are fortunate.

This article provides a brief overview of what a technical editor does. The article on page 3 offers editing tips.

The Difference Between Writing and Editing

First, it is helpful to understand that writing and editing are two very different processes, requiring different approaches and different readers. It is very difficult to look at your own writing with an editor's eye. Therefore, it is quite normal to expect changes on a document that you have written.

Technical editors do not "look down on" the writers we edit; we know that our own writing requires outside editing as well. In other words, when an editor makes changes, corrections, and suggestions on a copy, there is nothing personal intended toward the writer. Editing is simply a common—and important—step in creating a strong, clear, consistent, and clean document.

Editing Tasks

The editor's overall tasks are to review the document for the following:

- grammar, punctuation, spelling, style, and format
- organization
- readability
- consistency
- logic



In addition, the editor ensures that all elements required are included (e.g., Transmittal Letter, Executive Summary, Table of Contents, List of Acronyms and Abbreviations, all tables and figures, and all appendices) and that the data in the text, figures, and tables are consistent and accurate.



Sources

For sources, editors rely on the company style guide, if there is one, first, and after that, an English handbook. We use a dictionary (*Merriam-Webster's Tenth Collegiate Dictionary* is preferred) for final decisions about spelling, capitalization, and hyphenation. We also use previous company documents to check for consistency. There are many other sources we use as well (a few are listed below), but these are the basics required for editing.

Here are some additional sources that might be useful to have or that your editor might rely on:

- Dodd, Janet S., ed. *The ACS Style Guide: A Manual for Authors and Editors*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: American Chemical Society, 1997.
- *The Chicago Manual of Style: The Essential Guide for Writers, Editors, and Publishers*, 14th ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Alred, Gerald J., Charles T. Brusaw, and Walter E. Oliu. *Handbook of Technical Writing*, 6th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2000.

Following are some examples of English handbooks. Every writer should have one, just as he or she should have a hardcover college-level dictionary. Any handbook should do.

- Hairston, Maxine, John Ruszkiewicz, and Christy Friend. *The Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers*, 6th ed. New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, 2002.
- Troyka, Lynn Quitman. *Simon & Schuster Handbook for Writers*, 6th ed. New Jersey: Simon & Schuster, 2002.

Technical Editing 101: How to Edit a Document

It is important to understand that one error in a document can make a writer—and a company—look foolish or even dishonest. So when your company's technical editor is making all those nasty red marks all over your pages, try not to throw things at him. At least, do not throw anything inedible.

A technical editor should edit every single document that leaves a company. A client's opinions of a company are often based on those documents; even a short letter can have a large effect.

The editor does the following tasks for each document:

- ◆ evaluates grammar, punctuation, spelling, house style, and format
- ◆ checks the organization of sections within the document, as well as the overall document
- ◆ looks for conciseness and readability
- ◆ makes sure there is consistency among and within the text, tables, and figures
- ◆ determines whether there is a logical and clear progression from findings to conclusions
- ◆ looks for the presence in the text of all the required sections

Sometimes it may seem that the technical editor makes suggestions that seem obvious or unnecessary to the writer (such as “define this term”). The reason for these kinds of comments is because of the wonderful thing that has happened to technical writing over the last 20 years. Now we are trained to write text as clearly and simply as possible, so that even a general reader can understand much of it. That is why a technical editor approaches the document as if he or she has no knowledge of the subject matter (and many times, we don't, which can actually be an advantage!).

Here are some specific problem areas the technical editor should check for in each document:

- ◆ figures, graphs, and tables are clear
- ◆ there are no errors in numbers in figures and tables (make sure data match in text and tables)
- ◆ an acronym and abbreviation list is included
- ◆ each acronym and abbreviation is defined the first time (and only the first time) it is used in the regular text
- ◆ capitalization is correct throughout
- ◆ hyphenation is correct throughout
- ◆ references are in proper format

◆ bullet lists are used correctly, according to company style

◆ headings are correctly numbered and named

◆ there are enough headings

◆ the use of and/or is avoided if possible

◆ appendices are referenced in order in the text and are complete

◆ maps and figures are clear, legible, and checked for spelling

◆ the text is not too technical-sounding or filled with jargon or vague phrases

◆ the title page has proper elements

◆ the table of contents matches text, including page numbering, headings, appendices, and titles of tables and figures

◆ the transmittal letter and executive summary are edited

◆ the font styles and sizes are correct

It is also important that the technical editor, the original writer, or a peer check the document after it is returned from

document processing to be sure all changes were made correctly and that the formatting is still correct.

As well as paying attention to all these details and rules, the editor must check for jargon (such as changing “with respect to” to “about”), clichés (avoid them like the plague; they are dead phrases with no meaning), active versus passive voice (sentences that begin with the subject are easier to follow), and wordiness (such as replacing “few in number” to “few”).

I hope this brief overview to what that strange little animal, the technical editor, does with your document helps explain all the noises emitting from her office, as well as all the marks on your reports. Try not to take any of it personally. We just love fixing errors.—*by Lori Jo Oswald, Ph.D., Owner, Wordsworth Writing, Editing, and Researching Services*



A technical editor should edit every single document that leaves a company.

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PUNCTUATION TIP: Understanding the Hyphen

Hyphens are often used unnecessarily after prefixes. Check the lists in *Merriam-Webster's Tenth New Collegiate Dictionary* if in doubt. Here are some examples of words that do not take hyphens after the prefixes that may surprise you: preexisting, semivolatile, nonprofit, nonhazardous, nonnegotiable. *The Chicago Manual of Style* is considered an excellent source for when and when not to hyphenate, as in the following examples of prefixes that normally do not take hyphens:

PREFIX	EXAMPLE
after	aftereffect
anti	antisocial
bi	bilingual
co	coworker
counter	counterbalance
equi	equilibrium
extra	extracurricular
infra	infrared
inter	interstimulus
intra	intraspecific
macro	macrocosm
mega	megawatt
meta	metacognitive
micro	microorganism
mid	midterm
mini	minisession
multi	multiphase
non	nonsignificant

Exception: non-achievement-oriented students

over	overaggressive
post	posttest

Exception: post-1990

pre	preexperimental
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Exception: pre-1970

pro	prowar
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Exception: pro-Freudian

pseudo	pseudoscience
re	reevaluate

Exceptions: re-pair (pair again), re-form (form again)

semi	semidarkness
socio	socioeconomic
sub	subtest
super	superordinate
supra	supraliminal
ultra	ultrahigh
un	unbiased
under	underdeveloped

Exceptions to the above include the following: if the prefix stands alone (pre- and postclosure elements),

if the root word is capitalized (mid-August, non-American), if the root is a number (pre-1900), if the resulting word can have two meanings (retreat and re-treat or un-ionized and unionized), or if the second element consists of more than one word (non-English-speaking, non-achievement-oriented students).

- Generally, hyphenate words with the prefixes **ex**, **all**, and **self** and the suffix **elect**: all-encompassing, self-employed, president-elect.
- Hyphenate a **numeral and a unit of measure used as an adjective**: a 1,000-gal. tank, 3-, 4-, and 6-inch-diameter pipes.
- Do not use a hyphen after **adverbs ending in -ly**: previously installed wells.
- Do not hyphenate **Latin terms**: in situ (per Webster's; however, you will see this term handled differently by different companies and agencies, so if a client prefers another way—hyphenated or italicized or both—go ahead and use that style for that client).
- Hyphenate **two words of equal value used as modifiers**: gray-brown soil.
- Hyphenate **compound modifiers when one word modifies or defines another** but does not separately define the noun being referred to: dark-green building (but no hyphen in large green building, since large does not modify green).
- Before a noun, **hyphenate a compound consisting of a noun and a participle**: decision-making skills, broad-based experience. But do not hyphenate if the expression follows the noun: Her experience is broad based. The well is 73 feet deep.

- Hyphenate a **phrase used as an adjective before a noun** (up-to-date account) but not if it follows the noun (the account was up to date).
- Hyphenate **compounds containing numbers that precede the noun**: 23-year-old woman, twentieth-century innovation, 2-year program, 7-foot depth, 7-foot-wide opening. But there is no hyphen in the following: in 3 years, 35 gallons of fuel, the woman was 23 years old.
- Hyphenate **fractions that are spelled out**: one-half, two-thirds.
- Hyphenate when referring to specific figures and tables: Figure 4-1, Table 3-7. Although numerals 10 and over are usually not spelled out, if you must begin a sentence with a **compound number**, use a hyphen: forty-six, one hundred sixty-three.—*Sources: Webster's, Chicago Manual of Style, college and company style guides.*

WORDSWORTH CLIENTS

Listed below are just some of the clients Dr. Oswald has handled writing and editing assignments for in the last few years:

Technical Editor: Clients have included ENSR Alaska, Montgomery Watson Harza, Bristol Environmental and Engineering, LCMF, CH2M Hill, Woodward-Clyde, EMCON Alaska, Terra Surveys, URS

Writer: Alaska Business Monthly, Petroleum News Alaska, Business News Alaska, Alaska Oil and Gas Reporter, Oregon School Study Council (reports and articles)

Newsletter Designer: Alaska State Fair, CRW, ENSR Alaska, Montgomery Watson Harza, The Grower Gazette, Alaska Pet News

Copy Editor: Crop Protection Management magazines and newsletters, Petroleum News Alaska, Business News Alaska, Kodiak Daily Mirror, Aster Publishing (12 technical magazines)

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