

September 2011

Dear Friend,

Last month's issue was about the important things to include in an article. I used the analogy of a puzzle, to describe how important it is to have all the necessary "pieces" on hand before you start writing. But the next step is just as important: holding those pieces together through details like grammar, spelling, transitions, and revisions.

A good analogy here is sewing. The details I just mentioned are like stitches in a quilt. While you're pinning the patches of a quilt together (as with putting together a puzzle), it's easy to make adjustments and move entire patches (or sections of your article) to different spots. Not until everything is in place do you need to start working on the details.

Just as a quilt falls apart without stitches, so an article "falls apart" without proper attention to the last stages of preparing it: proofreading, editing, and revisions. (One big difference between writing and sewing that I'm grateful for: It's a lot easier to move words around than it is to remove stitches!)

This issue covers the "stitches" you need to include in your own articles.

Details, Details . . .

by Chris Wilson

If spelling and grammar bring back painful memories from junior high English classes, you're probably grateful for tools like Microsoft Word's spell check and grammar check. But you'll have to go beyond those tools if you're doing anything more than writing a memo for someone in your office.

Below are what I consider the six most important things to consider when editing your article, and some good "help tools" for each:

- Spelling
- Grammar
- Transitions (between paragraphs and sections)
- Revisions (rewriting)
- Link checks (for Web content)
- Proofreading (checking accuracy of the first five items on this list)

Spelling

Aside from your word processing software's built-in spell-check program, a **dictionary** is the obvious "tool of choice" for this one. Spelling errors bother some more than others, but in general, it's a good idea to catch as many of these mistakes as possible. Just one spelling error could damage your credibility in the eyes of many potential customers - especially if that mistake is on your website.

Grammar

According to one online dictionary, grammar is "the study of how words and their component parts combine to form sentences." One of the best tools for help with grammar is [The Elements of Style](#), written by [William Strunk, Jr.](#) I have the second edition (1972), which includes a chapter on writing and an introduction by [E.B. White](#) (award-winning author of *Stuart Little* and *Charlotte's Web*). The most recent version is the 4th edition.

Transitions

I'm including this "detail" because it's such an important part of almost any type of writing. Transitions are words and phrases that help you move smoothly from one paragraph or section of writing to the next. The best ones are almost invisible. There's a great online resource for this at [The University of Richmond \(Virginia\)'s website](#).

Revisions

Another word for revisions is rewriting. This is a task you'll need to get in the habit of doing, no matter what type of writing you do. A couple of years ago, I did an issue on editing ("[Editing - the Invisible Force Behind Your Writing](#)"), which is another way to describe revisions. [Bill Walsh](#), Copy Desk Chief for the *Washington Post*, wrote a fun book on editing which I describe under RESOURCES at the end of this newsletter. Be sure to check out his website too: [The Slot](#).

Link Checks

Checking the accuracy of any links you've included in your content is obviously more relevant for online information. But it's also important in print if you've written out any URLs.

The best way to check outgoing links is to just click the links to see if they open the correct pages. If you see an error message, you can check back later to see if the problem was temporary due to server problems. If the problem is *not* temporary, you can try finding the correct URL through a Google search.

What's NOT so obvious is how to check backlinks - links that connect to your website from other sites. **(Backlinks strongly affect your site's ranking in the search engines, so it's important to make sure they're working properly.)** Since programs come and go for this type of thing all the time, I'm just listing a reference site here so you can compare them yourself: [SEO Rankings](#). The blog on this same website is good too: [SEO Blog](#).

Proofreading

After everything else on this list has been done, it's time to proofread. If possible, try to wait awhile before reading everything over. And as I suggested in my previous newsletter on this same topic ("[Proofreading: How Picky Can You Get?](#)"), it's ideal if you can find someone else to read it for you. A second pair of eyes is very helpful when it comes to proofreading!

One handy tool for proofreading is [Spell Check](#) - a small book that shows the syllable breaks (and correct spelling) for over 40,000 words. Much quicker to use than a dictionary! Of course, you can always use the Internet too. For example, [SpellCheck.net](#).

Listed below are two more helpful resources - one online and one print.

RESOURCES

[The GrammarBook.com](#). The owner of this site is [Jane Straus](#), author of [The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation](#). Her background's interesting. Even though she's well-known in some circles as an expert in grammar, she's also a life/ relationship coach and author of [Enough Is Enough! Stop Enduring and Start Living Your Extraordinary Life](#).

She's been interviewed by national media like ABC and NBC, and has written for publications such as *USA Today* and *Woman's World*. Straus also offers [corporate services](#) in the form of business consulting and conferences.

[Lapsing Into a Comma](#) by [Bill Walsh](#). This book was published in 2000, but still very relevant today. It's also a fun book to read - not dry and boring, as you might expect from a book on style and grammar. Lots of interesting sidebars too.

To your success,



WORD DESIGN

916.801.0480

cwilson@worddesign.biz

www.worddesign.biz