



Self-Editing Checklist

"The simple believe everything, but the prudent give thought to their steps." - Proverbs 14:15

Introduction

Self-editing is a critical step in preparing your manuscript for professional review. This comprehensive checklist will help you systematically review and improve your work before submission. Remember, good self-editing doesn't replace professional editing—it prepares your manuscript to receive maximum benefit from professional services.

Essential Principle

Self-editing requires reading your work as a reader, not as the author. Distance yourself from your emotional attachment to specific words or phrases and focus on clarity, flow, and impact.

Phase 1: Big Picture Review

Structure and Flow

- Each chapter has a clear purpose and main point
- Chapters build logically toward your book's overall message
- Opening chapter hooks the reader effectively
- Conclusion reinforces your main message and provides clear next steps
- Transitions between chapters feel natural and purposeful
- Overall book length is appropriate for your genre and audience
- No chapters feel rushed, underdeveloped, or unnecessarily long

Content and Message

- Central message is clear throughout the entire book
- Each chapter supports and advances your main theme
- Biblical foundation is solid and scripturally accurate
- Personal stories and examples directly relate to your points
- Balance between teaching and practical application
- Tone remains consistent with your intended audience

- No contradictory statements or confusing theological points

Phase 2: Chapter-by-Chapter Review

Individual Chapter Checklist

Opening Elements

- Chapter title clearly indicates the content and theme
- Opening paragraph draws reader in with a compelling hook
- Chapter purpose is established within the first few paragraphs
- Connection to previous chapter is clear (if applicable)

Body Content

- Main points are clearly organized and easy to follow
- Scripture references are accurate and properly cited
- Personal anecdotes enhance rather than distract from the message
- Technical or theological terms are defined for general readers
- Paragraphs have clear topic sentences and stay focused
- Examples and illustrations effectively support your points

Chapter Conclusions

- Each chapter has a satisfying conclusion that reinforces the main point
- Practical application or reflection questions are included where appropriate
- Smooth transition or hook to the next chapter
- Chapter length is appropriate (typically 2,000–4,000 words)

Phase 3: Sentence-Level Editing

Clarity and Readability

Sentence Structure

- Vary sentence length for better flow (mix short and long sentences)
- Eliminate unnecessarily complex or convoluted sentences
- Use active voice wherever possible for stronger impact
- Remove redundant phrases and unnecessary words
- Ensure subject-verb agreement throughout

- Check that pronouns have clear antecedents

Word Choice and Style

- Replace weak verbs with stronger, more specific alternatives
- Eliminate overuse of adverbs and qualifying words
- Use concrete, specific language rather than abstract generalities
- Maintain consistent tone and voice throughout
- Remove or replace clichés and overused phrases
- Ensure vocabulary is appropriate for your target audience

Phase 4: Technical and Formatting Review

Biblical References and Quotations

- All Bible verses are quoted accurately
- Bible translation is consistently cited (ESV, NIV, etc.)
- Scripture references follow proper format (Book Chapter:Verse)
- Quotations are used in proper biblical context
- Permission obtained for extensive use of certain translations (if required)

Formatting and Consistency

- Consistent formatting for chapter titles and section headings
- Proper formatting for quotations and scripture references
- Consistent use of italics, bold, and other emphasis
- Names, places, and terms spelled consistently throughout
- Chapter numbers and page numbering are correct
- All footnotes or endnotes are properly formatted

Phase 5: Proofreading Pass

✦ Proofreading Strategy

Print your manuscript and read it aloud. Reading aloud helps you catch awkward phrasing, run-on sentences, and missing words that your eye might skip over when reading silently.

Grammar and Mechanics

- Check spelling of all names, places, and specialized terms
- Verify punctuation, especially with quotation marks and scripture references

- Ensure proper capitalization of biblical terms and names
- Check for missing words or duplicated words
- Verify that all sentences are complete thoughts
- Review comma usage, especially with complex sentences

Numbers and Dates

- Check accuracy of all dates, statistics, and numerical references
- Ensure consistency in how numbers are written (spelled out vs. numerals)
- Verify chronological accuracy in personal stories and examples
- Double-check biblical dates and historical references

Phase 6: Reader Perspective Review

Audience Considerations

Accessibility and Inclusion

- Language is welcoming to readers at different stages of faith
- Theological concepts are explained clearly for general audiences
- Cultural references are explained or universally understandable
- Examples represent diverse experiences and backgrounds
- Tone is encouraging rather than judgmental or exclusive

Practical Application

- Readers have clear understanding of how to apply your teachings
- Action steps are realistic and achievable
- Balance between challenge and encouragement
- Practical examples help readers connect to the material
- Questions or exercises help readers engage with the content

Common Self-Editing Mistakes to Avoid

Content Errors

- **Over-explaining:** Trust your readers to understand concepts without excessive repetition
- **Tangential stories:** Ensure all personal anecdotes directly relate to your point
- **Inconsistent theology:** Review for contradictory statements or unclear doctrine
- **Assuming knowledge:** Define terms and concepts that might be unfamiliar

Style Weaknesses

- **Passive voice overuse:** "Mistakes were made" vs. "I made mistakes"
- **Weak verb choices:** "He was walking" vs. "He strolled" or "He hurried"
- **Redundant phrases:** "Free gift," "final conclusion," "advance planning"
- **Filler words:** "Really," "very," "quite," "rather" often weaken your writing

Professional Tips for Effective Self-Editing

Time and Distance Strategy

- **Take breaks:** Allow at least a week between finishing and editing
- **Read in different formats:** Screen vs. printed page reveals different errors
- **Change your environment:** Edit in a different location than where you wrote
- **Read backwards:** Start with the last chapter to focus on individual elements

Technology Tools

- **Spell check:** Use it, but don't rely on it exclusively
- **Find and replace:** Search for your common error patterns
- **Word count tracking:** Monitor chapter balance and overall length
- **Comment features:** Use document comments to note areas needing attention

🔍 Final Self-Edit Test

Ask yourself: "If I picked up this book in a bookstore, would I want to keep reading after the first chapter?" If the answer is no, identify specifically what needs improvement and address those issues before submission.

Preparing for Professional Editing

Once you've completed your self-editing checklist, your manuscript is ready for professional editing services. Remember that professional editors can provide the most value when they receive a well-prepared manuscript that has been carefully reviewed by the author.

Ready for Professional Editing?

Your thorough self-editing demonstrates your commitment to excellence and prepares your manuscript for the professional editing process. At Tranquility Pages, our experienced editors will build upon your careful preparation to help your message reach readers with maximum clarity and impact.

Contact us to discuss your editing needs:

✉ info@tranquilitypages.com | 🌐 www.tranquilitypages.com

"Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." - Colossians 4:6

