



TOP 10 SELF-EDITING MISTAKES

1. **Relying on an automated spell-checker.** You can end up saying “their was a problem” instead of “there was a problem.” A spell-checker built into a word processor can’t tell the difference. Both words are spelled correctly, but they have different meanings.
2. **Confusing hyphens and en dashes.** Here’s one example: a hyphen would be used in a phone number (e.g. 123-9876); but an en dash should be used in an inclusive number (e.g. 31–35).
3. **Confusing hyphens and em dashes.** The em dash has many uses, such as setting off parts of sentences (e.g. “He knew—somehow—that the phone would ring soon.”). A sentence should never include more than two em dashes. There are also 2-em and 3-em dashes, which have their own specialized uses.
4. **Entering two spaces after a period instead of one.** For typesetting purposes, enter only one space after a period that ends a sentence. Also, enter one space after a colon.
5. **Misusing commas in dates.** A date should have commas before and after the year. November 17, 2000, would be correct. November 17, 2000 would be incorrect.
6. **Misplacing a closing quotation mark.** In American English, commas and periods precede the closing quotation mark, whereas colons, semicolons, questions marks, and exclamation points follow the closing quotation marks. The police found “no meaningful clues.” Did the police really find “no meaningful clues”? The police said they found “no meaningful clues”; however, a suspect was arrested the next day. (Note: Increasingly, this same standard is being accepted more and in England and other English-speaking countries.)
7. **Dangling your participles.** While digging for clams, lightning struck nearby and I ran inside. In this sentence the participle, “digging,” is left dangling. The lightning was not digging for clams, but the sentence structure makes it sound as if it is. Here is the correct way to rescue your participle: While digging for clams, I saw lightning strike nearby and ran inside.
8. **Misplacing your modifiers.** When a sentence begins with a modifying phrase, make sure the noun being modified immediately follows the modifier. Here’s an example of a misplaced modifier: Like any other dog, a man can train his collie to fetch. The correct way: A man can train his collie to fetch like any other dog. Misplaced modifiers can occur at any point in a sentence.
9. **Ignoring connotation.** Avoid using a word or phrase that has an inappropriate connotation. “Thanks to the hurricane, eighty people perished” gives the impression the deceased are grateful to the hurricane. You can easily rephrase the sentence: The hurricane killed 80 people.
10. **Confusing into and in to.** Into belongs with a verb of action: He walked into the room. In to connects a verb to an indirect object: He turned himself in to the police.

This list represents only a minuscule portion of the body of knowledge with which a good editor must be familiar. For applications other than academic tomes or newspaper articles, the most-commonly accepted standards are the latest editions of *The Chicago Manual of Style* and *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*.

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