

Improve your writing's substance

Error-free writing is ideal, but your writing must be more than just free of glaring typos and grammatical mistakes. It must also be clear—and aptly convey the message you want to share. Follow this checklist to fine-tune your draft into polished prose:

Is the purpose immediately clear? Within the first couple of sentences, readers should know why you wrote the piece.

Check your length. Paragraphs should be no more than eight lines. The occasional long or complex sentence is OK. However, do your best to stick to shorter—14 words or fewer—sentences. They are easier to process.

Have you stayed on topic? Read your entire piece, not to look for errors, but to pinpoint any times you've strayed from your main topic. Omit any content that doesn't relate directly to the topic.

Did you cover all the details adequately? Are you missing any information or background details that your readers need to fully understand the topic? Did you go overboard and include information that readers don't need? Too much can be distracting, while too little causes confusion.

Could anything be misconstrued? Remember that without the benefit of voice tone and body language, people can easily misinterpret written messages. Read your writing, specifically looking for words or phrases that could be taken the wrong way.

Have you organized the piece? Even emails need structure. Make sure you have grouped information together and organized your thoughts so that each topic is covered before you move on. Plus, use headers and bullets or numbers to break up your ideas and make the content easy to scan.

Did you include a strong call to action? Do readers know what to do next?