

Editing for impact

Your grammar and punctuation are impeccable. Your spelling is spot on. But if your copy still—how shall we put it?—lacks a little life, it's time for a different kind of editing. From big-picture issues to word-by-word scrutiny, these surefire tips will help you up your impact.

1. Ask the key questions

- *Why?* What are you trying to accomplish? Keep that goal front and centre as you assess your text.
- *Who?* You don't address a love letter "to whom it may concern." Know exactly which readers you're trying to reach, and see your copy through their eyes. Is the content relevant? Are you speaking their language? Does the tone ring true?
- *How?* A PowerPoint slide should have a maximum of five lines of text so your audience can read it. Newsletter articles need a catchy headline. Brochures have front and back panels, a flap and an inside spread. Make sure your copy fits whatever format you've chosen.

2. Assess your structure

- *Identify content issues.* Is your information organized logically? Are there gaps that might puzzle readers or irrelevant material that could be removed? Would examples make your message clearer?
- *Make an impact.* Capture your readers' attention with strong introductions and conclusions. Tell stories to bring your content to life.
- *Create flow.* Build smooth transitions between sentences and paragraphs. Signposts like *however, in contrast, therefore* and *for example* can help readers follow your train of thought.
- *Make it easy to scan.* Headings and subheadings help break up dense text. Meanwhile, bullet points can make information easier to digest.

3. Get surgical

- *Trim the fat.* "Scientists within the environmental community believe that climate change is a leading contributor to droughts experienced in Africa in recent years" could stand to lose a few pounds. Why not say, "Environmental scientists link recent droughts in Africa with climate change" instead?
- *Shorten sentences.* Stuff too much junk in your purse and you'll never find your keys. Likewise, cram too many ideas into a sentence and your readers may miss your point. Limit yourself to one idea per sentence and ditch all those subordinate clauses.
- *Energize your writing.* Make passive phrases active. "The innovation award was won by a local organic farm" may be grammatically correct, but "A local organic farm won the innovation award" is far livelier (and shorter!).

Want more? Send your copy to boot camp with our *Editing for Impact* seminar. Contact us for details at info@cadmiumred.ca.