

7 Tips for Diplomatic Editing

Guiding a team through their writing efforts and editing the resulting documents can be a difficult, sensitive situation for team leaders, peer reviewers, and editors. But the time spent coaching a team to plan writing efforts and to write well will be repaid in greater efficiency long term. Below are strategies for guiding the writing effort and for enhancing a team's writing skills.

- 1. Give the document separate readings for (1) purpose and organization, (2) completeness and correctness of information, and (3) wording and mechanics.** Each of these levels of editing calls for a different focus. For example, it is impossible to look for misspellings and comma errors while keeping an eye on overall organization. Work from general to specific, as listed above, so that you don't waste time correcting grammar in a paragraph that may eventually be removed because it doesn't suit the document's purpose.
- 2. Read the document completely before you pick up a pencil.** Your goal is to find the main point, purpose, or thesis statement. It should be easily found, clearly stated, and logically supported. If it isn't, you may need to review with the writer what the document was intended to accomplish.
- 3. Don't cross out the writer's words.** To suggest improvements, do so by bracketing the words or phrases that might be left out or changed; then write your suggestions above the bracket.
- 4. Phrase criticism as gently and positively as possible.**
- 5. Be flexible. Just because someone writes with a style that differs from your own doesn't mean that he or she isn't communicating clearly. Change someone else's words only with good reason:**
 - If information is incorrect or incomplete.
 - If wording is misleading or illogical.
 - If wording is negative or too blunt.
 - If the sentence is grammatically incorrect.
 - If the document is wordy.
- 6. Don't overwhelm the writer. When working to improve a writer's overall style, offer only a few suggestions at a time, usually beginning with suggestions to improve structure.** Sometimes simply asking for a shorter version will eliminate a writer's tendency to be verbose or redundant.
- 7. Be positive! Reinforce the writer's strong points.** Encourage him or her to reproduce them in future documents.

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