

Professional English, Inc.

Speaking, Writing, and Cultural Training

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An Editing Checklist for 2005

By Dr. Maureen Archer

If you are a regular reader of this column, you have noticed that I love to give practical advice. So, to continue this tradition, I offer the following checklist to help make your revising process during 2005 smooth and productive:

Purpose

- ✓ Why are you writing the document? What do you want readers to do when they have finished reading?
- ✓ Is the purpose clearly stated in the first paragraph?

Content

- ✓ Is the content focused on what your readers need to know (not on what you want to say)?
- ✓ Have you anticipated and answered readers' questions throughout the document?
- ✓ Are your points adequately, but not excessively, developed?
- ✓ If you need your readers to act, is there a clear action step (with a clear time reference) at the end of the document?

Organization and Layout

- ✓ Is your most persuasive information early in the document?

Spotlight On... a Client



Miryan Luna is amazing. In 1986, she decided to leave her native Colombia and move to Virginia Beach. She had little money and only basic English skills, but she had her extensive knowledge of skin care and a strong determination to succeed.

Miryan owns Luna's Clinic, a very successful clinic in Virginia Beach that treats a wide range of skin problems (from acne to dark spots to wrinkles). She also developed an expert line of skin care products, which she sells internationally.

"I went to Professional English to improve my pronunciation, grammar, and writing," says Miryan. "Now my clients understand my speech much better, and they praise the quality of my newsletters."

To learn more about Miryan, her clinic, and her skin care products, please visit her website at www.lunaskincare.com.

- ✓ Does each idea proceed logically from the previous idea (chronologically, general to specific, or cause to effect)?
- ✓ Have you inserted headings in longer documents to help your readers stay focused?

Paragraph Structure

- ✓ Does each paragraph develop only one idea?
- ✓ Is that idea clearly stated in the first sentence?
- ✓ Does the paragraph contain five or fewer sentences? Is each sentence shorter than 25 words?

Style and Tone

- ✓ Is the style clear, concise, and easy to read?
- ✓ Is the vocabulary appropriate for the readers?
- ✓ Does the tone (formal or informal) stay consistent throughout the document?

Mechanics

- ✓ Is the grammar correct throughout?
- ✓ Is the punctuation correct throughout?
- ✓ Is the spelling correct throughout?

One of the most important techniques for successfully revising your document is to **read your writing out loud twice**. During the first reading, you can keep your readers' needs in mind as you improve idea development and organization. After editing for these larger issues, try reading each paragraph aloud to catch grammar mistakes and revise difficult sentences. If you have trouble reading your own writing, chances are so will your readers.



Happy Holidays!

Dear Dr. A:

"How can I remember when to write **its** and when to write **it's**?"

Asked by a participant in the Business Writing Workshop at NASA
(November 2004)



Dear Writer:

Here are two ways to remember these spelling differences:

It's is the combination of **it + is**. Think of the apostrophe as breaking **it's** into two pieces (= two words). To test this usage, try saying **it's** as **it is**. For example, "**It's** a nice day" = "**It is** a nice day."

Its is used like **his**: "The committee has made **its** decision. Bill has made **his** decision." These possessive pronouns both have three letters, end in "s" and don't have an apostrophe. To test this usage of **its**, try substituting **his**. For example, "**Its** decision was final" ("**His** decision was final").

Is this spelling correct? (answer below)

Its important that it's screen be replaced.

Please send your communication questions to Dr. Maureen Archer (archer@allenglishtraining.com).

Answer:

It's important that **its** screen be replaced.
(**It is** important that **his** screen be replaced.)

Thank you to all of our clients for keeping us busy during 2004. Special thanks go to our larger clients:

NASA Langley
Liebherr Mining Equipment
Titan America/Tarmac
Jefferson Lab
Iceland Seafood

We look forward to helping your employees improve their communication skills in 2005.