Self-Editing Strategy Guides

Preface for Teachers

This file includes the paper-based self-editing strategy guides I have used in my classes.

Since first developing the guides, I have adapted the format by creating graded surveys in Canvas (see screenshot below). I've found this to be a teacher- and student-friendly way to share the information and keep students accountable for trying the strategies.
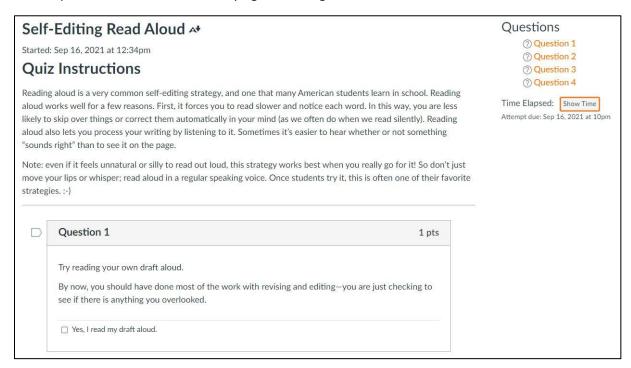

Self-Editing Read Aloud ⚟

Started: Sep 16, 2021 at 12:34pm

Quiz Instructions

Reading aloud is a very common self-editing strategy, and one that many American students learn in school. Reading aloud works well for a few reasons. First, it forces you to read slower and notice each word. In this way, you are less likely to skip over things or correct them automatically in your mind (as we often do when we read silently). Reading aloud also lets you process your writing by listening to it. Sometimes it's easier to hear whether or not something "sounds right" than to see it on the page.

Note: even if it feels unnatural or silly to read out loud, this strategy works best when you really go for it! So don't just move your lips or whisper; read aloud in a regular speaking voice. Once students try it, this is often one of their favorite strategies. :-)

Question 1   1 pts

Try reading your own draft aloud.

By now, you should have done most of the work with revising and editing—you are just checking to see if there is anything you overlooked.

☐ Yes, I read my draft aloud.

Questions
- ⑦ Question 1
- ⑦ Question 2
- ⑦ Question 3
- ⑦ Question 4

Time Elapsed: [Show Time]
Attempt due: Sep 16, 2021 at 10pm

Figure. Screenshot of Canvas graded survey for read aloud strategy

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Strategy 1: Read Aloud

Assignment Goals

- ☑ Recognize and correct your own grammatical errors.
- ☑ Discover self-editing strategies that work well for you, to continue using in the future.
- ☑ Become a more independent and self-aware writer.

Overview

Reading aloud is a very common self-editing strategy, and one that many American students learn in school. Reading aloud works well for a few reasons. First, it forces you to read slower and notice each word. In this way, you are less likely to skip over things or correct them automatically in your mind (as we often do when we read silently). Reading aloud also lets you process your writing by listening to it. Sometimes it's easier to hear whether or not something "sounds right" than to see it on the page.

Note: even if it feels unnatural or silly to read out loud, this strategy works best when you really go for it! So don't just move your lips or whisper; read aloud in a regular speaking voice. Once students try it, this is often one of their favorite strategies. ☺

Practice: Self-Edit Your Draft

1. Try reading your own draft aloud.

   By now, you should have done most of the work with revising and editing—you are just checking to see if there is anything you overlooked.

2. How many mistakes did you find and correct?

Reflection

What have you learned about the benefits of reading a paper aloud? Write a few sentences about this self-editing strategy and how well you think it works for you.

Is this a strategy you plan to use again in the future? Why or why not?

Partially adapted from Ferris, A Guide to College Writing for Multilingual/ESL Students*, p. 60.*

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Strategy 2: Reading Strategies

Assignment Goals

- ☑ Recognize and correct your own grammatical errors.
- ☑ Discover self-editing strategies that work well for you, to continue using in the future.
- ☑ Become a more independent and self-aware writer.

Overview

You've already learned about one common reading strategy—reading aloud. Like reading aloud, these other reading strategies work because they help you to read slower and notice each word. All of these strategies can be used while reading silently or while reading aloud. Here are three new reading strategies to try:

1. Printed Copy

Print a paper copy of your draft. It's surprising what you will notice on a printed page that you didn't see on the screen! Working with a paper draft can be helpful not only for editing, but also for the revising stage of the writing process. Because you can see all the pages at once, side-by-side, it's easier to see if there are sections that are repetitive or need to be reordered.

2. Backwards

Start with the last sentence of your draft, and read it backwards, one sentence at a time (not one word at a time!). This helps you to see each sentence individually, outside of the flow of ideas in the paper. Thus, you can notice sentence-level and word-level problems because you're not distracted by the content of your writing.

3. Line-by-line

Change the window of your word processor to show only one line of the text at a time. Or, working with a paper copy, use a second sheet of paper to cover up everything but the top line of text. Read just one line at a time, paying close attention. You'll see mistakes because you're moving slowly and focusing your attention.

Practice: Self-Edit Your Draft

1. Try one (or more) of these reading strategies. Write down the ones you tried below:

2. How many corrections did you make?

Reflection

Write a few sentences about what kinds of changes you made and how well these reading strategies worked for you.

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Strategy 3: Pattern of Error

Assignment Goals

- ☑ Recognize and correct your own grammatical errors.
- ☑ Discover self-editing strategies that work well for you, to continue using in the future.
- ☑ Become a more independent and self-aware writer.

Overview

Most second language writers have trouble with a few specific areas of English grammar and tend to make repeated mistakes in these areas. For example, you might struggle with subject-verb agreement, singular/plural nouns, articles, and/or punctuation.

One of the most effective ways to reduce these repeated mistakes in your writing is to focus on editing for one specific pattern of error. This means you choose one area to focus on, and read your draft looking just for that type of mistake (and ignoring anything else).

For example, if you want to work on subject-verb agreement, you could circle all the verbs in your draft, then underline all the nouns, and check to see if you've made any mistakes.

This kind of editing does take a lot of time, but it's very effective. It helps you notice more mistakes because you are focusing your attention to look for them. It also helps you review the rules, and making repeated corrections should help you make fewer mistakes in the future.

If there are several areas you want to check, it's best to edit in several rounds—each time focusing on just one area at a time.

Practice: Self-Edit Your Draft

1. Using instructor feedback or your own understanding of your strengths/weaknesses, choose 2-3 types of errors that you make frequently in your writing.

   Here is a list of common types of errors for second language writers:

   a. Verb form (correct ending)

   b. Verb tense (correct time—past, present, future)

   c. Subject-verb agreement

   d. Noun ending (plural or possessive)

   e. Article (missing, unnecessary, or incorrect)

   f. Punctuation and/or run-ons and/or fragments

2. On a printed or digital copy of your draft (with no comments/marks from anyone else), read through the draft focusing on ONLY ONE pattern of error.

   a. As you read, highlight, underline, or circle the specific grammar area you want to work on—the verbs, nouns, commas, etc. Mark EVERY example of the structure (even ones you think are correct).

3. Then, look at every structure you marked and ask yourself if it is correct or not. If it's not correct, do you know how to correct it? Make corrections.

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a. Which pattern of error did you focus on?

b. How many errors did you find?

c. How many errors did you correct?

4. Optional: choose another pattern of error and repeat the process.

Reminder: be sure to update the version of the draft that you'll be submitting for a grade with any corrections/changes you made while trying this self-editing strategy. (For example, if you completed this editing exercise on a printed copy, you'll need to transfer the corrections to your digital file).

Reflection

Write a few sentences about how this strategy worked for you. What did you learn about the benefits of focusing on one pattern of error? Is this a strategy you plan to use again in the future? Why or why not?

Partially adapted from Ferris, A Guide to College Writing for Multilingual/ESL Students*, p. 62-64.*

Strategy 4: Time

Assignment Goals

- ☑ Recognize and correct your own grammatical errors.
- ☑ Discover self-editing strategies that work well for you, to continue using in the future.
- ☑ Become a more independent and self-aware writer.

Overview

One of the easiest ways to notice mistakes in your writing is to give yourself some extra time for editing. The challenge with this strategy, though, is managing your time and planning ahead.

You can use this strategy by taking a break after writing/working on your draft. After you've had at least a half-hour break (or, even better, overnight!), come back to re-read your work, looking for mistakes.

This strategy works well because we can all overlook mistakes in a document that we've been working on for a long time. Taking a break and seeing the document with "fresh eyes" helps us to notice things we wouldn't have noticed otherwise.

If you're working on a long piece of writing, it might be better to edit one section at a time, so that you don't get too tired (if you're too tired, you will also overlook mistakes).

Practice: Self-Edit Your Draft

1. Once you've made all the changes you'd like to make based on instructor/peer feedback and your own ideas for improving your writing, set your draft aside for at least a few hours (or overnight).

    a. How long did you wait between sessions working on your draft?

2. Come back to your draft and look specifically for any grammar, mechanics, or style issues you can find. Make corrections.

Reflection

Write a few sentences about what kinds of changes you made and how you think it helped you to set aside your writing and come back to it later. Is this a strategy you plan to use again in the future? Why or why not?

Strategy 5: Tech Tools

Assignment Goals

- ☑ Recognize and correct your own grammatical errors.
- ☑ Discover self-editing strategies that work well for you, to continue using in the future.
- ☑ Become a more independent and self-aware writer.

Overview

Technology tools have become very helpful resources for writers to improve their writing. On the other hand, no tool is perfect, so it's important for writers to know which tools are available, how they work, and what they will and won't help with. Here are some examples of common technology tools you probably already use: spell check, grammar check, translators, dictionary/thesaurus. These types of tools can be really helpful, but there are also some drawbacks.

Tips:

Always run the spell and grammar check!

- Your readers should not have to read mistakes that are easily identified by these computer programs. If the automatic underlining bothers you, change the settings, and run the spell and grammar check manually when you are finished with your draft.
- Remember that the spell check isn't perfect. There are some issues that it can't identify—like wrong word choice, proper names, field-specific vocabulary, etc. You can customize it, though, by adding words to the dictionary.
- Be sure to choose carefully if spell check suggests several different words—don't just pick the first one. If you're not sure, check a dictionary.
- Be careful with grammar check—it is not designed for second language writers, so it doesn't catch some mistakes that are typical for ESL students. It also gives some advice that may or may not be wise to follow, like avoiding passive voice. Remember that the grammar check is just a computer—and you know more than the computer! ☺

Avoid translators.

- Unless you are translating just a word or short phrase, a translator is not a helpful resource for writing. They typically produce sentences that have so many grammar mistakes they are hard to understand.
- It's much better to use your own knowledge of English to write on your own—you might still have some grammar mistakes, and you might not be able to say things that are as sophisticated as you do in your native language, but your ideas will understandable.
- Also, your writing skills will never improve if you don't practice them…by actually writing (not using a translator)!

Use the dictionary or thesaurus carefully.

- A bilingual dictionary can help you find/translate a word quickly, but the meaning and use of words can vary in the two languages.
- An English-English dictionary can help you check that you're using the word with the meaning you need in the right way to communicate your idea. Look for example sentences and advice about collocations. Two recommendations:
  - Longman http://www.ldoceonline.com/
  - Merriam-Webster www.learnersdictionary.com

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- A thesaurus can help you find synonyms, add variety, and increase your vocabulary. But be careful, again, to check that you're using new words correctly.
- Using the dictionary and thesaurus can help improve your writing, but be sure you don't lose control of your own work by using them too much. If you can't understand your draft because you've used too many new words, you've overused the dictionary/thesaurus.

Other Technology Tools to Explore:
Ludwig (also an app)
This free site lets you type in a sentence or phrase and see other examples of similar phrases. You can compare your writing to authentic samples to see if you might need to make corrections. See instructions here.

Virtual Writing Tutor
This is a free spell/grammar checker designed for ESL writers. It has other features, too, like help with paraphrases and vocabulary. There are explanations about all these features on the site, some with explainer videos.

Speech recognition and text-to-speech
- Speech recognition allows your device to type the words you say out loud. Some students find it easier to process ideas by talking first, so they can use speech recognition to create a first draft by talking instead of typing.
- Text-to-speech allows your device to read out loud to you. This can help you use your listening skills to help with reading as well as editing.
- Specific tools:
    - Microsoft Office and Windows (instructions here and here)
    - Google Docs Voice Typing (instructions here)
    - Apple Dictation for i0S (instructions here)
    - Natural Reader (free & paid versions)

With all of these tools, it's important to use your own knowledge and experience to help you make the best decisions about your own writing. Each tool above can be useful, but they all have flaws. You have to be responsible for your own work by evaluating their advice carefully, and remember that there are no shortcuts to becoming a better writer—you've got to practice writing!

Practice: Self-Edit Your Draft
1. Run the spell-check (or pay attention to what it underlines as you write).

    a. How many misspelled words does the spell-check usually correct for you?

        i. Many? Some? Few?

    b. Are there certain words you typically have trouble spelling?

    c. Do you have trouble with words that spell-check doesn't usually find? (such as homophones or words with similar spellings but different meanings)

2. Run the grammar check (or pay attention to what it underlines as you write).

    a. What types of mistakes does the grammar check identify for you?

    b. What does it miss? (Try looking at a paper with feedback from me to compare).

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3. Pick one of the other technology tools listed above. Try using it to help you edit your draft.

    a. Which new tool did you try?

    b. How did you use it?

    c. What kind of changes did you make as a result?

Reflection

How do you typically use tools like the spell-check and grammar-check? (For example, do you have them on all the time and correct mistakes as you go? Do you wait till you're finished, then run them?) Why?

In general, how well do you think computer-based tools work for you? What are the advantages and disadvantages?

Are there any other computer-based tools you find helpful?

Partially adapted from Ferris, A Guide to College Writing for Multilingual/ESL Students*, p. 64-66.*

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Strategy 6: Your Choice!

Assignment Goals

- ☑ Recognize and correct your own grammatical errors.
- ☑ Discover self-editing strategies that work well for you, to continue using in the future.
- ☑ Become a more independent and self-aware writer.

Overview

This semester, you've tried a variety of different self-editing strategies:

- Read aloud
- Reading strategies
- Pattern of error
- Time
- Tech tools

You've probably found some of these strategies more useful/effective or enjoyable than others. It's important to remember everything you've tried this semester so that you can continue using those strategies that work best for you in the future.

Practice: Self-Edit Your Draft

1. For this self-editing activity, choose at least one strategy from the list above to use as you edit your final reflection project. Which strategy/strategies did you choose?

2. How many corrections did you make?

Reflection

Write a few sentences about what kinds of changes you made and how well these two strategies worked for you.

Of all the editing strategies you know (the ones we've studied this semester or any others you use on your own), which ones seem to be most effective for you? Why?