Advice to research students on editing: Opportunities, responsibilities, techniques and direct writing

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(See BLOG at www.research.ecu.edu.au/grs/blogs/blog.php?id=gmaguir2)

1. Scope of this document

1.1 Origin and recommended background reading.

This document evolved as the hard copy notes for a series of workshops at ECU in 2007 called "Editing Skills for Research Students". Those workshops were in two parts. The first covered the types of editing a researcher might undertake while the second dealt with the technical challenges associated with editing to improve style and structure rather than content. For some of the students English was their second language so all attendees were provided, with preparatory exercises and solutions (Maguire, 2007a,b). After the workshops, the attendees were encouraged to attempt more challenging editing exercises (Maguire, 2007c). This current article should assist research students and early career academics. It is updated periodically and now refers to a numbering system for writing faults (Maguire, 2008a,b,c).

1.2 Summary and caveats.

Sections 2-5 explain the types of editing roles that researchers may take on and the responsibilities that go with them. Research students need to look ahead to the time when they may have obtained a PhD or equivalent award and will become the provider of editing support rather than just the recipient. Editing and related advice are usually provided within the generous spirit inherent in being part of the "community of researchers" and can be extremely useful to colleagues. However, as an Editor, Referee, Supervisor or colleague, should you continue to provide specific advice if the recipient is not incorporating it into their style of writing e.g., in the next document they write? They may of course not agree with you. If, however, recipients accept the changes but do not learn from them, the provider of the advice may have become an editing service and this just encourages dependency.

Sections 6-11 highlight some common technical challenges involved in editing for style as opposed to content. One model for structuring a journal paper i.e., "the Double Funnel", is described. Typical grammatical errors are examined, some of which occur if authors attempt to write in too complicated a style. Techniques for deconstructing complex text are described so that examples of subject/verb disagreement can be identified. Examples are provided of efficient communication that can be achieved with **"direct writing" i.e., minimising the number of words used while still conveying the information in text that can be read aloud easily**. However, writing styles should not become too predictable or readers lose interest.

Writing this type of article for research students is challenging as not all comments are useful for all fields of study. Some Supervisors/disciplines also seem to have a preference for more complex writing styles. This is a broad article and the intention is to develop more specialised workshops and supporting documents e.g., assessing paragraphs or whole pages rather than individual sentences as in this article.

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2. What is editing?

For research, it is the process of improving the quality of written work and may involve deciding or recommending whether it is acceptable for the author(s) to receive an academic award e.g., a PhD, or to publish the writing in a journal or book/technical report/final grant report. There are other important types of writing that involve researchers, for example, research grant applications, submissions to management and popular writing. These other forms may target a range of audiences that may have a large amount of technical knowledge in the field or almost none. There is some overlap e.g., grammar, between these other forms of writing and the more academic writing that is the focus of this workshop i.e., formal writing. However, I have not attempted to cover these other forms here.

I should emphasise that these notes are not necessarily written in a formal style but rather they reflect how I might explain specific issues during a meeting with a client. As such, there is generous use of present tense and statements may move from third person e.g., “Students often…” to second person “You will…” and to first person “I find….”. Formal writing is mostly in past tense and mixes “person” less.

At the most simple level editing can be proof reading i.e., looking for obvious errors (with spacing, spelling, incorrect grammar, inconsistent use of font, awkward phrasing, repetition, etc). When editing to make the key decisions/recommendations noted above, it could involve questioning whether the work constitutes an original and worthwhile contribution to academic and professional literature i.e., editing for content and not just style. An intermediate role is providing advice to a colleague on some of their professional writing. That might include any of the above but also suggestions about where to publish the writing. In most cases, decisions are not just YES/NO but also involve giving detailed feedback on how to improve the writing.

3. Why develop editing skills?

The most obvious use of such skills is to be able to edit your own writing before Supervisors or co-authors see it. A common complaint from academics is that students often do not look ahead to the completion of their award and visualise themselves in professional employment. Many research students fail to realise that their careers will develop to the point where they will have to become the Editor rather than always being the recipient of editing support. Professional researchers usually receive much less editing support than research students.

4. Should you accept an editing role?

4.1 Overview

It depends on the document. In general, you should try to avoid editing outside of your area of competence. If you feel that you have to edit outside of your field, focus more on style. Similarly, an Academic Writing Consultant will focus on style but may pose a few questions to demonstrate interest in the client's research.

Sometimes Academic Supervisors or Research Managers within government departments acquire students/staff who are not working in the Supervisor's/Manager's specialist field and, if you are in this situation, you have to do the best you can with editing work from these students/staff. Ideally, you can co-opt a specialist as a Co-supervisor or adjunct Supervisor (the latter is not a member of the academic staff at ECU) or send the document to a relevant professional contact outside of your government department.

If you provide detailed advice to a colleague or research student and they fail to learn from it or choose not to use it, it is questionable whether you should continue helping that person with that type of advice. The colleague may not agree with your advice and if that is the case then just accept it as that person's view and stop offering that advice to that person. If they agree but do not apply it in their next document, you may be being used as an editing service. There are paid professional editors who may accept such work but most colleagues/Supervisors do not want to be an editing service. **To avoid this situation if you are the writer, develop a checklist of your writing challenges e.g., subject verb agreement (Section 8.4.8), that you can use to help with self-editing before you impose that draft on other people.**

4.2 A section of a draft thesis for a fellow student

Helping colleagues is part of the research ethos i.e., as part of the community of researchers. However, do not be too dogmatic given your limited experience as an editor. Remember, you are not the Supervisor. Fellow students can try to take on that role without the authority and their own work can suffer in such cases.

4.3 As a Supervisor of a research student

As a Supervisor of a research student, there is another key consideration. How much of the text should you edit? You could do every line and your student will probably have a greater chance of having their thesis accepted but in the process have they learned how to use feedback and apply it to additional text? Some Supervisors may only edit parts of a student's work and expect the student to apply that editing to the rest of the thesis. This can be part of a strategy for mentoring the development of a student's writing skills. In the end, it is the Supervisor who chooses the appropriate strategy and it is certainly not the Academic Writing Consultant's role to interfere in that relationship. The following web sites may be useful for exploring these issues in more detail (http://www.ddogs.edu.au/cgi-bin/papers.pl?cmd=d&fid=33424) and (http://research.ecu.edu.au/grs/thesis/preparation.php). Maguire (2008c) provides additional options for Supervisors.

4.4 As a co-author

The collective responsibility of the author and co-authors is to produce the best draft they can. It is your right (and responsibility) as a co-author to comment on at least one draft as you are supposed to earn that co-authorship and you do not want something substandard to appear with your name on it. In the end the first author has the final say and, if you cannot live with the outcome, you can always tactfully withdraw from the authorship team. (If you are writing a paper, with your Supervisor, which is based just on your research, you should be the first author but value your Supervisor's experience when considering his/her suggestions on content and style.)

Supervisors who are editing a paper as a co-author, with their student as the first author prior to submission of the student's thesis, face some conflicts. You may not want to provide very comprehensive editing (see above) but your name will be on the published paper and hence it can affect your reputation. If the data are appropriate, it creates credibility for a student to publish during their candidature; theses which have already generated several published or accepted papers are very rarely rejected by Examiners (provided the candidate can write an incisive General Discussion section). It also helps with attracting postdoctoral opportunities or scholarships for Masters students moving to a PhD. Honours students who delay their move to PhD candidature, and hence have time to have a paper accepted before seeking a PhD Scholarship, could also benefit. The other advantage of publishing during your higher degree is that you get detailed feedback from the Referees chosen by the journal (Section 4.5) or book Editors (Section 4.8) and can incorporate this into your thesis before you submit it.

4.5 Being a Referee for a journal

The key issues are whether it is in your field of expertise and whether you can handle the task given your current workload. Many academics decline such opportunities but it is part of the research culture to "do your bit". You can recommend a more suitable Referee but you cannot hand over the manuscript to a colleague without the journal's approval because you have to treat it as confidential. However, you could discuss a technical issue with a colleague without handing over the manuscript or providing the name(s) of the author(s). (NB. Not all journals provide the names of the authors to the Referees.) Pannel (2002) discusses problems posed by inconsistent, illogical or slow refereeing (from an author's perspective) and provides useful information sources.

4.6 Being an Examiner for a thesis
The comments in the preceding section apply here and delays in returning your assessment are probably more critical than with a journal. My personal experience is that I was probably too demanding as an Examiner when I was first offered the opportunity to take on this role. My general advice, for what it is worth, is that standards have to be maintained but try not to be too tough. I am much more concerned about the quality of a thesis than its length.

4.7 Being on an Editorial Board of a journal or a Guest Editor for a volume
Provided you can handle the workload, these are significant opportunities and should be treated as such. The latter opportunity can arise from your role as an organiser of a conference that will generate complete, high quality papers to be published as a set within a journal or as a book (see below). Ideally, the manuscripts should be provided to you at the conference. An alternative or complement to editing a journal volume based on a conference is to be a compiler. Here you ensure that an appropriate format is applied but you do not comment on the quality of the work provided by the authors (except perhaps to do a spelling and grammar check). I have done this for volumes aimed at Industry and I usually ensure that there is at least a suitable cover, a page written by me which explains the purpose of the workshop, a contents table for the volume, an Abstract for each paper and a copy of the PowerPoint slides e.g., 6 to a page.

4.8 Being a Book Editor
Being invited to be the Editor, for a book with different authors for different chapters, is a significant opportunity but is a lot of work. Ideally, you will write one or more chapters and the Foreword, Preface or Introduction to the book.

The roles in the next two subsections are strictly not editing but are both important and influential roles.

4.9 Reviewing a published book
Personally, I have found this to be very challenging in terms of the time required.

4.10 Summarising conferences or workshops
This role can be verbal, written or both. Unless there are concurrent sessions, you should attempt to attend every presentation. The challenges are to identify themes or outstanding contributions. A complementary role is judging best paper or best student paper awards. The ethical issue here is to not unfairly favour your direct colleagues, research students or ex-students. Objectivity is the key. If the written summary is to be included in the conference proceedings then prompt delivery of that summary is also important.

5. Editing –when, why, limits and style
5.1 Turn around time for editing
As a general guide, during my career as a researcher I aimed for 2 weeks, however, a thesis often took longer. My personal experience is that it is best to attack editing/reviewing as soon as it arrives or there is a risk that delayed editing will drift further back in the "work pile". If you cannot find time to undertake the task, do the right thing and return the work unassessed. I aim for a week in my current role but advise a student if the current queue is lengthy.

5.2 Why do we edit, assess or examine?
First, I will try an analogy. My view is that we should not write submissions to our employers, Supervisors or Editors of journals as some type of therapy for our short term anger or frustration. We write in those cases to achieve change through calm, objective, informed and effective writing. Similarly, we edit, assess or examine to help an author or ensure that standards are met. **There is, however, no role here for personal likes or dislikes of people (or their Supervisors) or for your own ego.** If I am asked who to recommend as Referees or, more importantly, as Examiners for theses, my first advice is to avoid those with excessive egos. Calm, objective, informed and effective comments are needed from an Editor, Referee or Examiner. In these roles you certainly do **not** have the right to humiliate an author or candidate.

5.3 Limits to what editing can achieve
You can help in so many ways when you comment on written work. If you are just editing for style you may fix errors, shorten the text, suggest deletion of existing sections or suggest the need for additional sections. If exploring content as well, you might suggest better statistical analysis procedures, additional tables or figures, or consideration of

additional references. If the author is “stretching the data too much” e.g., ascribing importance to non-significant trends in the data, you could attempt to quell such enthusiasm. However, what editing cannot fix is badly designed and implemented research. In these cases you may need to recommend deleting part of the data set or abandoning of the paper altogether.

5.4 Which style is appropriate for a publication?
It depends on the nature of the publication and the audience you are seeking to inform/help. A scientific journal makes assumptions, about the technical or research knowledge of its readers, that are not appropriate for a popular magazine or a workshop volume aimed at Industry (albeit some industry audiences can be very sophisticated). Follow the style of the journal you choose as much as possible.

6. Is the structure of the document correct?
If we use a scientific paper as an example, we have the Title and the Abstract before we reach the Introduction and other sections. These first two items are will be considered in Sections 7.1-7.2. The rest of the paper can be considered to have the following structure (i.e., the “**Double Funnel**”).

Introduction (I) — (I) Begin broadly; capture the audience.
Progressively become more specific.
End the Introduction with what your study covers e.g., your key question(s).

Methods (M) — (M) Just describe your methodology but perhaps briefly explain decisions made.

Results (R) — (R) Just give your actual results with virtually no discussion. Highlight the important results. (You must refer to each table/figure or delete it.)

Discussion (D) — (D) Begin with your most important results, then broaden the text out to end with the significance of these results to the audience you captured in (I).

(If there is no separate Conclusions section, you have to answer your key research question(s) in the Discussion, assuming you posed one in the Introduction. The Conclusions section is quite specific but you can also highlight the generic significance of the study.)

This approach can be adapted to theses. There might be five chapters that contain results of different aspects of the project and such chapters have their own “Double Funnel” structure (possibly with specialised methodology sections) but there will still be an overall Introduction/Literature Review and a General Discussion for the thesis. The use of multiple data chapters can lead to some repetition in individual and general discussion sections. (Clearly, this structure does not suit a published literature review/book/book chapter. These will have multiple sections and subsections but can still retain the principle of moving from the more general to the more specific.)

In a thesis, the Introduction and Literature Review should lead you through the gaps in the literature and hence to your research questions. The Introduction itself will have a funnel shape that again leads from the general to your specific topic. One potential problem is introducing the very detailed aims of your project too early in the thesis, as the reader may need more background to understand these aims. During a Higher Degree by research, the Literature Review is a “living document” which can be progressively developed and updated from the version accepted in your proposal. The ECU Graduate Research School runs courses on how to write Literature Reviews (http://research.ecu.edu.au/grs/resources/calendar.php). Conceptual drawings or flowcharts seem particularly well suited to the Introduction and Literature Review sections as they concisely show the key components of the study/topic and their linkages.

A common problem is the Literature Review that discusses one published paper per paragraph. Unless the intent is to show the historical development of a research strategy or there are very few relevant published studies, this strategy is generally unacceptable. The problem is that it usually represents a summary of each study without the intellectual step of integrating the information i.e., where are the commonalities and contrasts among these studies? Once that challenge is met, you can use fewer paragraphs that internally link related studies. However, the commonalities and contrasts are not always apparent to a Writing Consultant, working outside of his/her field, and input may be needed from the Supervisor.

7. Common problems with major sections

7.1 Title

A Title is a form of advertising and it should define the scope of a study accurately. If the Title is too broad, it will tend to drive the writer to prepare a very broad literature review e.g., for of a PhD proposal or thesis.

Conversely, a Title might be too detailed. It is not always necessary to list the individual variables that are being assessed in the study. I have used “performance of” to replace growth, survival and food conversion efficiency for” in Titles of biological papers e.g., “Performance of black tiger prawns (*Penaeus monodon*) fed different commercial diets in ponds”. For another field it might be “Social impact of unemployment” instead of “Effects of unemployment on rates of homelessness, divorce, imprisonment and suicide”. This second example could also lend itself to a structure incorporating a colon (see below).

The Title for a journal article can be complemented by a Keywords section that does not have to just mirror the Title. This increases the effectiveness of “e-advertising”, i.e., users can find relevant papers via data bases that rely on matching the users search words with those in the Title or keywords. **Avoid very long Titles unless the research is so technical that they are required.**

Example: “How effective are overseas-based telephone information centres for helping and informing Australian consumers?”

I do not mind the use of a question as a Title, however it can be shortened greatly to:

“Efficacy of offshore telephone information centres for Australians”.

Rationale: The use of “Efficacy” is obvious. Telephone information centres are set up to help and inform so we do not need to say this. Clearly, Australians using these services are potential consumers so again we do not need the word “consumers”. If the topic specifically covered permanent residents or newer arrivals, the title may have to be revised i.e., what do we mean by “Australians”? This example serves the dual purpose of highlighting short direct Titles and giving some indication of how to edit text, hopefully without losing important information. Rarely do we need sequences such as “A study of…” for a journal article or a thesis or even “A review of …” if it is being submitted to a journal that obviously specialises in reviews.

The use of colons in Titles seems to be becoming more popular. They are not mandatory and can just be a band-aid for awkward writing. However, they can be useful for highlighting the broader significance of a study followed by a more specific description of the study itself. They are particularly useful in Titles for reviews. A real example is “Evolution at a system level: the natural history of protein interaction networks”. (The lower case “the” follows the style of that review journal.) We could also adapt the example used above as “Social impact of unemployment: Rates of homelessness, divorce, imprisonment and suicide”. There are many styles.

7.2 Abstract

This is one of the most difficult sections to write and is generally drafted after the rest of the paper. For journals, you should consider the style of the journal e.g., some journals accommodate long detailed Abstracts whereas others favour shorter ones containing less discussion. Some journals do not accept *P* values, in an Abstract, i.e., probability results arising from statistical analyses.

Generally, the Abstract should not introduce material that is not presented in the paper itself. As the Abstract is a stand-alone document, definitions, abbreviations and scientific names used there have to be repeated when first used in the rest of the paper.

The other Academic Writing Consultant for ECU, Dr Jo McFarlane (pers. comm.) provided the following as a guide only, rather than as a rigid formula, for the Abstract in a thesis.

“1. One paragraph or section on the background to the problem you investigated
2. One paragraph or section on what you did (what your problem was about)
3. One paragraph or section on how you did it = methods
4. One paragraph or section on what you found = results
5. One paragraph or section on what they mean = conclusions/recommendations”. A section might only be 1-2 sentences.

7.3 Introduction
The major issues have been covered above. Again, different journals will prefer longer or shorter Introductions but all will want a statement of the scope of the specific study covered by the paper. As indicated in the “Double Funnel” model (Section 6), commence broadly and narrow down to your specific issue/research question.

7.4 Methods
This section will vary greatly depending on the discipline and topic. Typically there will be subheadings. Referencing standard methods and just highlighting variations from those methods will help keep the Methods section compact. You may need to explain why you chose a particular approach in your methodology but Editors will be concerned if there is very extensive discussion, rather than description, of methodology unless the paper is largely about developing appropriate methodology.

In a thesis there is often more emphasis placed on using longer methodology sections which provide a theoretical framework for the choices made. It is also appropriate to explain seemingly odd choices e.g., in my Honours thesis I explained that I used both fresh and frozen crab blood because I had a limited number of collection trips and small live holding facilities for my crabs. The assumption way back then was that freezing crustacean blood (haemolymph) did not affect the mobility of major blood proteins in a porous gel when subjected to an electric field (electrophoresis). The study proved that it did and this generated substantial discussion later in the thesis (as well as a journal paper).

Statistical methodology should be detailed and include the assumptions, that were required for the method chosen, as well as indicating how their validity was confirmed. Doing this also increases your credibility as a researcher.

7.5 Results
In general, there is little discussion in this section although some journals do allow the author to briefly place the results in context. Subheadings can be useful for organising the Results for a broad study. Editors/Examiners should not allow inclusion of tables, figures and photos that are not formatted and titled/captioned in the style of the journal and nor should they allow these items to be included if they are not referred to in the text. The latter point also applies, in my view, to appendices in theses.

The text should highlight the key results. I am not keen on statements such as “The growth, survival and food conversion results are shown in Table 1.” A caption exists for that information. It is more effective to include a key result when directing the reader to the table. An example is “None of the five diets significantly affected survival ($P>0.05$) but Diet 1 produced much faster growth ($P<0.001$) and better food conversion ($P<0.01$) than the other diets. These four diets sustained similar performance for growth and food conversion ($P>0.05$) (Table 1)”. Another example would be “While none of those surveyed agreed with the imposition of the maximum sentence allowable under the law (X years), their proposed sentences varied greatly (Fig. 1)”. In another field it might be “Of the seven categories available to the inbound international tourists surveyed at Sydney Airport, the majority selected ‘natural beauty’ as the reason for choosing Australia as a holiday destination (Fig. 1)”.

7.6 Discussion
As highlighted above you should begin this section with your key result(s) and build out from them. If your Discussion is much broader in scope than the Introduction, I would be concerned, except where you are applying self criticism, discussing unplanned outcomes or highlighting where future research should head. Some research students try to extend their Discussion to applications/directions that are too far beyond the scope of their work. Do not head into the stratosphere even in a General Discussion for a thesis! Your Discussion section should indicate how the state of knowledge in your field has been influenced by your findings. Clearly, there should be quite a few references but it is not just another literature review.

7.7 References
The key point is to be thorough and follow the required style. For a Higher Degree thesis at ECU, the choice of referencing style is a matter for you and your Supervisor. The style does not have to be that used by APA (American Psychological Association). You might choose the style for the journal you plan to publish in or have published in. Using ENDNOTE is a great idea and it has benefits beyond ensuring that you have provided the publication details, for each study cited in your text, in an appropriate and consistent style. You can download references from much larger data bases e.g., NISC in biology, and create your own customised data base. I like to include the Abstracts as this new searchable data base becomes more useful that way. ECU runs courses on ENDNOTE and there is a good introductory document on the Graduate Research School website:
(http://www.research.ecu.edu.au/grs/data/tmp/guide_to_endnotev9ecu.pdf).

8. Common stylistic problems

8.1 Background

Since the workshops on which this article is based, I have developed an interactive web document (Maguire, 2008a) that allows readers to explore 20 common stylistic problems (Maguire, 2008b), through multiple levels of explanation. It is difficult to be comprehensive as the challenges vary with individual writers. ESL (English as a second language) writers face particular challenges e.g., some languages do not use the equivalent of "an" or "the" and may place very little emphasis on paragraphs. Some cultures instil a very respectful approach to other writers; this could discourage research students from adopting a more critical approach.

Below I have used some examples (disguised or created) that mostly arose from my editing of writing by research students at ECU (local and international students). Some examples of advice I have given to research students are also included.

8.2 Linking short paragraphs and sentences (and a note on punctuation)

"In general, there is an overemphasis on very short paragraphs so that it follows a newspaper or popular magazine style, where the writer cannot assume that the reader is able to concentrate on a longer coherent paragraph e.g., for a newspaper that might be read on a crowded train. You should be able to make that assumption for an academic reader." Similar advice would often apply to use of very short sentences, however, some short sentences are very effective e.g., "A Credit Union is not just another bank." Examples of effectively linking short, related sentences are given in Maguire (2007b,c) and generally this strategy makes the writing more interesting.

The important issue when writing a paragraph is that there should be a clear reason why it has ended and a new paragraph has begun i.e., there should be logical connections between the material included in one paragraph. I recently edited a section of a draft thesis in which three different theoretical perspectives were explained across two paragraphs. This was not logical; you need one paragraph or three paragraphs. As the material for each perspective was quite detailed, I suggested three paragraphs. I do not support artificial breaks in a paragraph but if I do draft a long paragraph, I then challenge myself to see if there is a logical break point in that paragraph. If I cannot identify one, I retain the long paragraph.

The use of the first two paragraphs in this section (8.2) is a case in point. Most of the material relates to paragraphs but I have separated the material on linking short paragraphs and sentences into one paragraph while the material on what constitutes a logical breakpoint between paragraphs is covered in the second paragraph. I could reasonably have reversed the sequence of paragraphs and gone from the general to the specific. However, I wanted to highlight the common tendency for research students, particularly students writing English as a second language, to use a style more suited to newspapers.

Another indicator of the need to combine paragraphs is the use of linking words.
"It is pleasing to see your use of 'linking words/sequences' to provide continuity but they are used excessively. It is unusual to begin a paragraph with such text and it may indicate an opportunity for fusing adjacent paragraphs. Examples include **However**, **Despite this**, **Regardless, Conversely, Similarly** and **In addition**.

The second last sentence i.e., the penultimate sentence, in the first paragraph of Section 8.2 highlights a key issue that not all authors have the same approach to punctuation. Where possible I prefer to position words such as "however" at the beginning of the sentence but if they link two parts of a sentence that is not possible. When you say the sentence aloud there is an obvious pause both before and after "however" and punctuation is needed; I use commas. Below I have recommended a very useful book on punctuation and grammar by Davidson (2005). He argues strongly for a semicolon in front of "however" when it is used as a link word within a sentence. Regardless, I have never had any of my manuscripts challenged on this point during the editing and publication process. Compared to many scientific writers, I use commas quite frequently in my writing, particularly to ensure that there is no confusion about the meaning of a sentence. An example is given in Maguire (2007c). However, too many commas in a sentence can make it difficult to read aloud. Such issues reflect differences in individual style.

8.3 Repetition of words

"You have a tendency to repeat words unnecessarily e.g., several uses of the word 'managers' within a sentence. The word 'they' can be substituted to provide variety" (see Section 8.4.9). Synonyms can also be used i.e., words that have the same or nearly the same meaning. This can be done by right clicking the word and selecting the synonyms option in WORD. However, care is needed as there can be subtle changes in meaning when similar words are used. Conversely, Section 8.4.7 addresses the issue of being consistent with the use of jargon rather than using synonyms.

You need to look for such patterns when you edit. For example, I recently edited the following (adapted) text. “The framework is developed based on the three strategic priorities in the field of strategic analysis claim that that the platoon’s strategic position, internal resources and potential for support from other units e.g., air cover.” Clearly, the complexity of this sentence has confused the writer so that the word “claim” does not do anything but disorient the reader. More specifically, the word “strategic” is used three times in the space of 14 words. This is not effective writing. I edited it as follows by combining it with the preceding short sentence:

“The first purpose of this chapter is to construct a strategic framework, for tactical advantage within a small army unit’s operations, based on three priorities; the platoon’s combat position, its internal resources and the potential for support from other units, for example, air cover.”

Having established in the first line that this was a strategic framework, it was not necessary to remind the reader of what was being attempted here e.g., we did not need to say “strategic priorities”. The army is not, of course, my field of expertise and there could be debate over the use of words such as “tactical” and “operations”. Note that in formal writing, as in the corrected sentence above, Latin abbreviations such as “e.g.,”, “cf.”, “i.e.,”, “viz.,” and “vs.” are given in full, for example, “, etc.” is written as “, and so forth.”, at least according to APA (unless used in a quote).

While I have also advocated minimising the number of words used, it is important that the style used does not become monotonous through being too predictable. This can be avoided by using synonyms, varying where authors’ names appear in sentences i.e., not always at the end, and use of appropriate but interesting adjectives e.g., instead of a “strong case for..” it could be an “incisive case for ..”.

8.4 Wasted text (a plea for Direct Writing)

8.4.1 Background

Section 8.4 covers a wide array of examples of wasteful or indirect writing some which also contain grammatical errors. It should be evident by this stage in the article that I write in a direct style. I assert that it improves the clarity of the writing and also simplifies a sentence so that it is more likely that any grammatical errors will be noticed. There are several techniques, highlighted as dot points below, that foster direct writing. The problem of repeating individual words (Section 8.3) has similarities with the problems of repeating the same information or providing information that is not needed as it is self-evident.

8.4.2 Sections of text that mean the same thing

Within a sentence you should not have two phrases/words that mean the same thing.

“The sentiment is echoed in other literature with Jones et al. (2000) also reiterating..”.

This can be shortened to “Jones et al. (2000) also emphasised…..”
“The sentiment is echoed in other literature” means “also” in the context of a literature review and the word “reiterate” means “to say or do again”, so the same meaning has been conveyed three times in this example. However, the use of “is echoed in” does contribute to a more interesting style.

8.4.3 Removal of self-evident text

An example of text that may not be needed is “Available literature indicates that” when it is within a literature review. The reader will assume that the information comes from “Available literature”.

A compound example, which involves self evident text **and** failure to use an already defined abbreviation within a sentence **and** indirect writing, is given below.

“There is a clear need to be more sympathetic to the needs of those who produce rather than just move product through the supply chain. The Naples programme of action goes further than this with calls for the overturning of the current economic order (Massey et al., 1992) in a bid to protect the rights of primary producers.” [58 words]

Here it is self evident that the very assertive second sentence “goes further” than the first sentence. The revised version is:

“We need to support producers more than other supply chain members. The Naples POA wants the current economic order overturned to protect primary producers (Massey et al., 1992).” [28 words. You could use “calls for” instead of “wants”. Note that not all researchers would agree with the use of “We” in academic writing.]

8.4.4 Sequences of words to be used sparingly
If you avoid certain sequences of words, unless they are clearly necessary, you will be able to shorten the text. Examples include;
"a number or", ("several" or be precise e.g., "five")
"a large number of." ("many" or be precise e.g., "20")
"in relation to", ("about")
"with respect to", ("about")
"in order to", ("to")
"considering all of the arguments", ("overall")
"on the other hand", ("conversely"). (Some authors also argue that "on the other hand" should be preceded by "on one hand".)

Some examples can involve two types of errors.
"A number of previous works.." REPLACE with "Several studies…". We did not need to say "previous" in a literature review because the literature is always "previous" to our study. We could legitimately talk about studies that were previous to a specific study e.g., one involving a breakthrough in methodology that calls into question the validity of previous studies.

Other examples are less standard but a group of wasteful statements can be highlighted by the following example; "the particular firm".. REPLACE with…"that firm".

8.4.5 Using a VERB to replace longer text
First, we will have a quick grammar lesson.
In "The cat ate the rat", "cat" is a NOUN, i.e., it is a thing, person or place, and in this case is the SUBJECT of a sentence. The word "ate" is a VERB, i.e., a doing word, and "rat" is also a noun but is the OBJECT of the sentence.

In "The hungry cat ate the small rat", the words "hungry" and "small" are descriptive words and are ADJECTIVES.

In "The cat ate the rat slowly", "slowly" is one of the most commonly used of all ADVERBS. These modify a sentence, a verb, adjective or another adverb. Research students often confuse adjectives and adverbs e.g., "general" and "generally", respectively. We might say "The general trend is…" (general is used as an adjective) or "I was speaking generally.." (generally is used as an adverb).

In "The cat in Jim's house ate a rat", "in Jim's house" is a PHRASE. Phrases begin with a PREPOSITION e.g., "in", "at", "on", "with", "to" and "for", and do not contain a verb. This phrase is "adjectival" i.e. it qualifies the noun "cat". Some are "adverbial" and relate more to the verb or whole sentence that they do to a noun e.g., "The rat ran in many directions", where "in many directions" is the phrase. Often it is possible to replace an adjectival phrase with an adjective e.g., replace "You should not wander off the trails in national parks" with "You should not wander off national park trails".

In "The cat which hangs around Jim's house ate a rat", "which hangs around Jim's house" is a CLAUSE. These often begin with "which", "who", "that", "why", "if", "although, or "when" and contain a verb. A clause is not a stand alone sentence although many students make this mistake in formal writing. Some of the words which begin clauses can be used to begin a question and these can be stand alone sentences e.g., "Which house does Jim live in?" (or more appropriately, "In which house does Jim live?").

If you wish to expand your knowledge of grammar try a good value book from the ECU Bookshop (Davidson, 2005).

Returning to this topic of shortening text by using a verb, we can REPLACE
"…..have an effect on .."
with:
"..affect…"
In this case "have" and "affect" are verbs and "effect" is a noun. Alas, "affect" and effect" can also be a noun and verb respectively in rather specialised cases. Maguire (2007b) highlighted these cases and explained that "affect", as a verb, can have different meanings.

> Thus we could say that "when we affect something we produce an effect i.e., a change." The verb "affect" can also mean to put on an appearance or to imitate e.g., to affect an accent. The word "effect" can be a verb in one type of circumstance e.g., "the army effected (pulled off or achieved) a coup. Similarly, "affect" can be a noun. The emotion produced by an idea is its "affect".

My colleague, Dr Jo McFarlane highlighted another common example. Instead of writing "undertake the measurement of" we can just write "measure". There is a whole family of such examples. Thus words with the form "xxxxment of" can often be replaced by "xxxx" e.g., "You should arrange confinement of .." can be replaced by "You should confine..". Another related family takes the form "xxxxion of" and can be relaced by "xxxx", sometimes with a minor change in spelling. For example, "when we get to the completion of the project.." can become "when we complete the project..".

8.4.6 Shortening of text by using an ADJECTIVE instead of a CLAUSE
An appropriate example is "..by using a strategy which is more profitable.."
REPLACE with:
"..by using a more profitable strategy..".

Another example looks like a phrase i.e., "in poor health", instead of a clause and highlights our tendency to drop out words. "A cat in poor heath should be taken to a veterinarian" could be written as "A cat which is in poor heath should be taken to a veterinarian" and can be shortened to "An unhealthy cat should be taken to a veterinarian".

8.4.7 Complex language and jargon; are they appropriate?
One research student told me that "I was told that Examiners like complex language. It impresses them." (It usually does not when, after a long day at University, an Examiner commences a thesis chapter at 9 pm!). However, as noted in Section 1.2, some Supervisors prefer complex writing and this may extend to Examiners, particularly in certain fields. One of the problems with complex language is that it can be difficult to identify the subject and the associated verb (see below). Trying to deliberately write in a complex style is even more difficult for students writing in a second language; it often leads to grammatical errors or confusing misuse of individual words. However, if an idea is quite complex or exists within a highly specialised field then it may not be amenable to the use of shorter direct explanations and indeed some jargon will be needed. **However, to write in a complex manner should not be your primary goal. The goal should be to write effectively.**

It is great to have a broad vocabulary but using it does not always achieve effective communication. One example is "..the structure of the coral reef was baroque..". Is the meaning clear? Does the writer mean "complex" or "ornate"? Borrowing language, from one field (architecture, visual arts and music) and applying it to another (biology), has some risks. (A similar coral reef statement did appear in the prestigious journal Marine Biology.) Not all reviewers like "more obscure" or "old world" words and I have been criticised for using the words "dearth" and "whilst" in my drafts. Similarly, some readers may consider the use of the word "efficacy" in Section 7.1 to be too obscure and would prefer "effectiveness".

It is quite acceptable to use jargon, without defining it, provided that there is general agreement on its meaning and that all of the readers you wish to "capture" understand the jargon. If there is any doubt, I prefer to define each "piece" of jargon. Having defined it, we then tend you reuse it in the document without further definition. Such reuse poses the issue of whether it is better to vary the language in a paper to make it more interesting? In Section 8.3 the issue of repeating words was covered with the implication that repetition should be avoided; jargon can be the exception. Once you define a piece of jargon, you can also define and reuse the abbreviation e.g., POA for Programme of action (see above). However, you should not use synonyms for that jargon even though repetition makes for less interesting reading. One research students had four key terms that he/she defined but then proceeded to invent at least three undefined synonyms for each of those terms and utterly confused me. **In formal writing, clarity should not be sacrificed for "colour".**

8.4.8 SUBJECT/VERB agreement
This is an example of a grammatical rule. For much more detailed coverage of grammatical terms and other writing issues see the following Canadian site: http://web.uvic.ca/wguide/Pages/GramGloss.html

The name of an organisation is usually singular but students often match it to a plural verb, possibly because an organisation contains many people. On other occasions the complexity of the sentence defeats students. The trick, in a more complex sentence, is to temporarily delete all of the phrases and clauses so that the basic structure of the sentence becomes clear.

An example which combines both of these challenges is:
"The World Health Organisation of the United Nations argue..". In this case "of the United Nations" is a phrase and, for just the purpose of checking the verb, it can be deleted.
We are left with:

"World Health Organisation argue..". It is clear that Organisation is singular and that the verb has to be singular so we use "argues". There may be potential for using abbreviations if already defined for these organisations i.e., "The UN's WHO argues.."

A less technical example may be easier.
"The boy, in the picture, who owns a lot of toys, are…" We temporarily get rid of the phrase "in the picture" and the clause "who owns a lot of toys" and the essence of the sentence is left "The boy are…" and there can be no doubt about the use of "is" instead of "are" i.e., "The boy, in the picture, who owns a lot of toys, is…" Notice also that the appropriate use of commas also helps us with seeing the essence of the sentence.

An example from another field may also help. "Expression of the genes overlap in the central nervous system". If you delete the phrase "of the genes", you are left with "Expression overlap in the central nervous system". It is now obvious that "expression" is singular and hence we should use "overlaps". The correct version is "Expression of the genes overlaps in the central nervous system".

All of these examples highlight a process for achieving "subject/verb agreement". This is probably the most common grammatical error made by research students.

An example of excessively complex writing that includes an error in the verb is given below. I adapted it from an even more complex example from a draft thesis.

"The problems and complexities of the duality of doing postgraduate research, which is applied but also attempts to make conceptual breakthroughs, as discussed by Albert (2000) who recognised that industry and academia can have different values, is evident within this project." [41 words]

Delete two phrases. "The problems and complexities of doing postgraduate research, which is applied but also attempts to make conceptual breakthroughs, as discussed by Albert (2000) who recognised that industry and academia can have different values, is evident."

Delete five clause-like sequences. "The problems and complexities is evident."
Clearly, the subject "problems and complexities" is plural so the verb "is" should be made plural i.e., "are". "The problems and complexities are evident."

However, we can write the complete statement much more directly. My suggested version is:

"This applied postgraduate research poses the dual challenges of being useful to industry and making the conceptual breakthroughs valued by academia (Albert, 2000)." [It contains 23 words and is easier to read.]

8.4.9 NOUN/CLAUSE agreement
One complex example highlights a related problem that a clause qualifies a noun and the verb(s) in that clause must be consistent with the singular/plural status of that noun.

"For instance, as Jones (2001) reports, men who wish to limit their car size face gender norms that equate size of car with virility and discourages men from making sensible consumer choices."

The relevant noun and clause are "norms" and "that equate size of car with virility and discourages men from making sensible consumer choices." (Strictly, this is made up of two clauses but for ease of reading we leave out the second "that" in "that equate size…..and that discourages men from…".
First temporarily delete the phrases from the clause(s).
"norms that equate car size and discourages men from making sensible consumer choices …."
The noun "norms" is plural and the first verb "equate" is correct as it is plural but the second verb "discourages" is singular and should be "discourage".

I revised the sentence to include that the study was from, say, Brazil. This was done to highlight that research results can depend on the culture and attitudes within the country in which it was conducted. The introductory words "For instance" are self evident and the use of "men" was repetitive so we use "they" on the second occasion. Clearly, choosing a car is a consumer choice so we do not need the word "consumer".

We are left with:

"One Brazilian study found that men considering smaller cars face gender norms that equate size with virility and discourage sensible choices (Jones, 2001)." [This comprises 23 words instead of 32. No offence is meant to Brazilian men!]

There can also be equivalent issues within an adjectival phrase.
"The company's relationship with its stakeholders… contains the phrase "with its stakeholders". As each relationship is unique, strictly it should be "The company's relationships with its stakeholders.." or "The company's stakeholder relationships..". Please note the spelling of **its** which is the possessive of **it** in this phrase. If the spelling **it's** is used it can only mean **it is** (see Maguire, 2007b). In contrast, the possessive of the singular word **company** is **company's** and the possessive of the plural word **companies** is **companies'** because the word ends with an **s**. Fortunately, **its** is the few exceptions to the way we write possessives. Spelling issues are covered in much greater detail by Maguire (2008b). A useful website that tests your ability to spell 50 of the most commonly misspelled words (based on UK spelling conventions) is http://dissc.tees.ac.uk/Mistakes/Spelling/Test/word1.htm

8.5 How do you learn to write or edit directly?
I hope that the topics covered in Section 8.4 will help you to recognise opportunities for condensing text effectively. The issues covered in Sections 9-10 should also assist (using topic sentences and summaries sparingly and effectively and reading drafts aloud). As I edit intuitively i.e., if the writing sounds or looks inappropriate I change it, it is difficult to teach someone how to do it although you should learn from multiple editing exercises (Maguire 2007c). In an editing workshop with a whiteboard, I do use a technique of underlining the key pieces of information in a sentence and enclosing words that seem less informative in balloons. This does guide the class to a better outcome and you could try this approach when self-editing.

8.6 Tense and Parallel Structure
Usually we write academic material in the past tense but some statements can be very powerful in the present tense e.g., in a journal article "We assert that the most commonly used methodology is inappropriate". These words would not be used in a thesis as there is no role for "we" i.e., only the candidate is being assessed. "We" should be used sparingly in academic writing or it loses its impact.

Some explanations are also written in the present tense. "This methodology is based on the assumption…".

In my career I have tended to not be as committed as many other academics to using "past tense" or "passive writing". (An example of passive writing is where we write "the stone was thrown by the boy" instead of "the boy threw the stone".) I look for effective writing. Past and passive tenses are less interesting to read but you will rarely be criticised for using past tense in a thesis. (In contrast, readers prefer present tense in popular writing.) Moreover, there are times when past tense is essential. One student in 2007 cited a study by Smith (2004) and presumably used the data in that paper, to write about the population and age distribution of a particular country. The student used the present tense whereas it would have been more appropriate to use past tense because the population would have changed from the year covered by this data set i.e., 2002.
Thus "The population of Country X in 2002 **was** 13,921,285 (Smith, 2004)…".

Unless you have a good reason not to, keep the tense consistent within a sentence.
"Johnson et al. (2000) found that retaining a higher proportion of speculative stocks fosters.." is not consistent in tense as "found" is past tense and "fosters" is present tense so we replace "fosters" with "fostered" which is past tense. Hence, it should be "Johnson et al. (2000) found that retaining a higher proportion of speculative stocks fostered.."

A related challenge is using words, which have similar status within a sentence, consistently. An example is "His aims were to be operating by June, reaching 60% occupancy by August and make a profit by December." The word "make" should be consistent with "operating" and "reaching". The sentence becomes:
"His aims were to be operating by June, reaching 60% occupancy by August and making a profit by December." The technical term for this requirement is "parallel structure" and it is covered in greater detail in the Purdue University (Indiana, USA) web resource (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_parallel.html). Equivalent challenges exist within a series of dot points and I ensured that all of the dot points in Section 14 began with a verb; they could have commenced with a noun or adjective plus noun as in Section 8.4. The issue here is one of consistency within a list not between lists. This website is worth exploring if you would like to build on your understanding of some of the technical issues raised in the second half of this workshop document. The only caveat I should emphasise is that American English is used within this website, as is also the case with Davidson (2005), rather than Australian English which is of course very strongly derived from British usage.

8.7 Citations within the text
It is often better to place the citation at the end of the text, as in the above example with Smith (2004), provided that you do not wrongly or unfairly attribute a comment or finding to an author. For example, if only the content of the first part of a sentence can be attributed to that author then the citation would be placed after that information rather than at the end of the sentence. To create a less predictable style, it is useful to begin some sentences with an author's name or the author' names e.g., "Jones et al. (2000) also emphasised….." (from Section 8.4.2). In a sequence of sentences all involving the same authors, their names can also be substituted with "They….".

Strong general statements still need to be supported by references, preferably reviews. Some students argue that such referencing is akin to "self-evident text" in that they believe that all readers would acknowledge the truth of some general statements. For a thesis, I recommend the more conservative approach i.e., include the reference. What you believe to be a general truth may be influenced by your cultural framework e.g., Australia is a country with an aging population whereas some countries are experiencing the exact opposite.

I am not a fan of supporting a statement with, say, 9 references. It is overkill. Recently, I edited a sentence that had 19 references in the first half of the sentence. A long list of references in a sentence conveys very little to a reader except that it has been an active field. It is better to introduce references more purposefully e.g., which key aspects do different references specifically highlight?

9. Topic sentences and summary sections
Topic sentences are used to avoid too large a discontinuity (or jump) in the subject matter in a section of text. They are typically used at the end or beginning of a paragraph or subsection e.g., at the end of Sections 4.10 and 8.4.1. They can be useful, particularly for undergraduates, but as your writing skills develop you may find that you rely less on them. This is because you develop a "natural flow" in your writing that minimises abrupt jumps. The problem I have with topic sentences is that they often require the reader to spend time on a sentence that contains very little information.

Suppose a paragraph ends with
"… The dietary protein requirements of marine fish are usually considered to be 30-50%, depending on the species and access to natural food items in the production system (Ref.).

Suppose the next paragraph begins with
"For most commercial feeds the limiting amino acid is usually Lysine (Ref.)."

Depending on the specialised knowledge of the audience, we could insert a topic sentence at the beginning of that paragraph. "As proteins are made of amino acids, only some of which fish can synthesise, it is also necessary to consider their essential amino acid requirements (Ref.)."

Alternatively, we could combine this topic sentence with the original first sentence in the new paragraph.
"Strictly, marine fish do not require protein itself but do need enough of each essential amino acid (Ref.) and in commercial feeds the limiting amino acid is usually Lysine (Ref.)."

This more direct style has avoided the need for an extra (topic) sentence but has provided meaningful continuity.

However, extreme discontinuities should be avoided. One research student jumped sharply from discussing the general characteristics of a particular disease to a new section dealing with the biochemistry of a specific protein. I drafted a topic sentence to bridge these topics by briefly highlighting the role of this protein in the occurrence of that disease. Intelligent researchers and examiners can deal with a reasonable step, in the type of information between paragraphs or subsections, without the need for a topic sentence. However, if you find regular use of topic sentences helpful at this stage in the development of your writing skills, then by all means include them.

A related issue is the need to summarise throughout a document. Most journals will not give you the print space to add summaries every page, however, an interpretive statement that provides a synthesis of the commonalities and conflicts in the literature is not only acceptable, it is desirable. Again, frequent use of summaries is a more undergraduate style and can be overdone to the point of annoyance. Some years ago, I read a one paragraph subsection in a research student's literature review and was then supplied with a summary of that one paragraph! Examiners of higher degree theses will find this excessive. However, if you feel you need to use summaries to give structure to your writing then do so but hopefully you will develop a style that flows better and is more interpretive than just providing summaries as listings of key points. A common error in summary sections is to include new material rather than just establishing the relationships between already introduced information/studies. This is in contrast to a “Conclusions” section in a paper or a “General Discussion” section in a thesis where you might highlight relevant options for future research.

As an editor, you might suggest the need for topic sentences or summaries if you find yourself asking “where is this article/review heading?” i.e., there is a need for some form of “road map”. Similarly, a contents list is very useful in a multi-section article and this current document is a good example of that need as it covers two large topics and has many specific components in each. However, the acceptability of a contents list depends upon the publication or School to which you are submitting writing.

If you are providing a section of a larger work for comment or editing e.g., to an academic writing consultant, include a simple table of contents of the larger work, if possible, as it helps us consider that one section in the context of the larger document.

10. Reading aloud
Do not be inhibited about doing this. Well written English can be read easily. Try reading your drafts aloud but read the actual words carefully so that you do not just read what you believe you wrote. For example, “A large of literature note..” does not read well. USE “Many authors found..” Other sections may not be wrong but are just awkward to read. Perhaps the sentence is too long or you do need some bridging words. Not all editing involves reducing the number of words.

11. Problems with feedback on a draft?

- Do you have trouble reading your Supervisor’s handwriting?

Many Supervisors will annotate the hard copy of your draft rather than provide electronic editing and I am not permitted to do electronic editing although I will supply a word processed summary of the major types of errors if needed. A common problem is that you have trouble reading the handwriting (hopefully not with mine). It certainly helps if you provide drafts in either 1.5 or double spacing. Interpreting someone’s handwriting can become easier as you obtain more exposure to it. You could ask another student or a staff member who works for your Supervisor. If it is tiny handwriting, use the A4 to A3 expanded copy mode on the photocopier. (If I am supplied with a carefully formatted conference paper in single spacing, I expand the page to A3 before editing it).

If none of the above suggestions works, you simply have to seek feedback from the person who provided the editing. **Do not just ignore the comment.** You could seek clarification at your next meeting or scan the section and email it back to that person.

- Did you not understand why the proposed change was made?

The handwriting was quite clear but you did not understand the reason for the change. These notes and the associated introductory and additional editing exercises should help with understanding suggestions based on style but the editing in question could have been based on content. My numbered writing fault initiative should help if used by the person providing the feedback (Maguire, 2008a,b,c). There are several possibilities.
(a) Your Supervisor has misinterpreted your meaning because your text may have been quite confusing.
(b) Your Supervisor made an assumption about your knowledge but perhaps you have not done enough reading on this particular topic.
(c) Your Supervisor has made an editing error. One of my faults is that I occasionally add proposed text but do not delete all of the words it should replace.

- Do you get frustrated with the volume of changes or inconsistencies in the editing provided?

These are very common complaints and have been for a very long time!
(a) Your Supervisor wrote so much on your draft.
Supervisors do not usually do this because of excess spare time but it can be disheartening for the student. The key is to try to learn from the editing and you should find that the volume of changes diminishes over time. If you do not learn from it, you could also find that the volume diminishes but for the wrong reason; your Supervisor is becoming less motivated to invest time in your writing because he/she cannot see an improvement in your skills. That person may feel that he/she is becoming an editing service.
(b) Your Supervisor corrects the change he/she suggested in the previous draft or has made a change to a section that he/she accepted in the previous draft.
This can be very frustrating and can arise for a few reasons. Firstly, editing is rarely 100% efficient. If I had time to read someone’s difficult draft a few times I would detect more writing challenges. I can become frustrated with my inefficiency when proof reading my own writing. Secondly, editing can be a trial and error process especially for content. A Supervisor might suggest a different strategy for laying out a complex diagram only to find that, when he/she

sees the outcome, it did not work well. Just as students should "live with their data" (see below in Section 14.2), Supervisors often do the same with ideas that they have provided to students and they may have decided that it was simply not the best advice in the first place.

12. Acknowledgments

I am grateful to those ECU students who allowed me to comment on their work; these experiences stimulated me to prepare these notes. I must acknowledge the excellent advice provided to me by Dr Jo McFarlane (ECU), a very experienced and committed writing consultant. Finally I note the very significant amount and quality of feedback I have received from generous Supervisors, colleagues, reviewers and Editors on my own writing during my career. Professor Tony Underwood from The University of Sydney was a major influence, particularly on how I structure manuscripts. This document has benefited from feedback received during the six ECU workshops that it underpinned.

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(See Appendix 1 on next page.)

14. Appendix 1. Key advice on editing and writing

14.1 How to get value from editing support and self-editing

- **Don't just accept the changes proposed. Evaluate them, then accept, modify or reject them.**
- **Seek clarification if you do not understand the handwriting or the reason for the proposed change.** Just tactfully ask the person who did the editing e.g., your Supervisor.
- **Look for recurring errors/challenges in your writing as revealed by editing.** (The new numbered fault system, Maguire (2008a,b) should help, if used.)
- **Use these to develop your own writing challenges checklist**; use it when you self-edit your next piece of writing.
- **Break the suggestions into, say, 3 lists if there are too many tips;** read the draft three times with a different list in hand each time.
- **Put a short list of, say, 3 tips beside your computer;** change the list each week. (I have seen keen students do this.)
- **Don't get too committed to your first draft**; welcome critical feedback and be prepared to revisit earlier chapters or drafts. I have revisited this article several times.
- **Check the changes you make when you edit a draft.** There is a good chance that you will have introduced an error e.g., sometimes I type in the replacement words but do not delete all of the words I intended to replace. If you edit from a hard copy, check that all of the annotations were included in the word processed document. Efficient PAs may highlight each change on their hard copy after they have added it to the e-draft.

14.2 How to approach your writing

- **Focus just on your writing or self-editing when at your desk**. (If you are dealing with other stresses in your life, try to leave them at the door to your office area.)
- **Have your information well organised.** (This arises partly from reflecting on the available information and jotting down thoughts as they come up. Carry a notebook or electronic equivalent. It could be described as "living with your writing".)
- **Have just the materials for that piece of writing on your desk.** If possible, shelve other material.
- **Try to minimise distractions.** If appropriate, turn off your mobile or email.
- **Take a walk or do some physical activity periodically** e.g., every 1-2 hours.
- **Accept that if you work late one night you will probably not be as efficient the next day.** However, for some writers it is very rewarding.
- **Aim for direct writing.** (Some would prefer to say "write concisely").
- **Read a draft aloud when the chance presents itself**. (I read this document aloud.)
- **Be aware of traps such as gender bias in your writing.** Some writers assume the author is male without checking.
- **Look for opportunities to publish during your time as a research student.**

(Version as at 4/2/08)