

Increase your editing efficiency in Word

Beyond learning the core editorial skills – copyediting and proofreading – key to the success of any business (editorial or otherwise) is making it financially viable. It is vital to be able to work both quickly and accurately.

Key efficiency tools

- Macros
- PerfectIt
- Find/Replace
- Building phrases and predictive text
- Word styles and templates

Experienced editors use a range of tools and techniques to achieve greater efficiency. Here we look at some time-saving tools for working in Word, which is the program professional editors use most often to edit text.

Assess the scope of the work

Bearing in mind that you wouldn't use a sledgehammer to crack a nut, finding the right tool to speed up editing depends on careful assessment of what needs to be done to meet the client's brief. Tools exist to increase accuracy and reduce the burden of repetitive tasks, but they won't all be applicable to all editorial jobs. For example, if you have a large project to edit, containing tens or even hundreds of thousands of words, every tiny task you can reduce, every decision you can make more quickly, will add up over the course of a long document to result in significant time savings. For a job that is much shorter or arrives in smaller batches, it might not be efficient or practical to use the same time-saving tools.

Macros

A macro is a small program within a program that can speed up or automate a sequence of actions. For example, a macro can, with a single keystroke or push of a button, run several Find and Replace routines and other actions, saving you the time of doing each action separately and manually. Macros can be used to analyse text too, for example by highlighting instances of inconsistency.

You can record your own macros in Word, or write them yourself (using the programming language Visual Basic for Applications), to suit your needs and workflow. Or, rather than reinvent the wheel you can use macros written by other editors. Paul Beverley's editorial macros, for example, are freely available from his website (archivepub.co.uk). His powerful FRedit macro enables you to carry out a set of Find and Replace actions all at once, and you can customise lists of changes required by each client. For more on macros, also see the CIEP fact sheet **Getting started with macros**.

Create a strategy

Assess the text yourself, or use PerfectIt or analytical macros to help you find patterns. For example:

- What's the dominant hyphenation style for a particular word or phrase?
- Are units of measurement treated consistently?
- Are there names with alternative spellings?
- Do the same fixes need to be made throughout to conform to house style?

Analysing the text will help you identify repeated actions you can automate or make quicker.

PerfectIt

PerfectIt is a piece of software used by many editors to check for consistency in text, and help them apply style decisions. It helps editors work more accurately and save time, and is customisable to suit a range of Englishes.

PerfectIt has built-in stylesheets for common style guides and you can build custom stylesheets for each client's preferences. It can be used at any point in a job, but many editors use it at the beginning to analyse the text and inform style decisions, and at the end as a final consistency check.

Find/Replace

At its simplest, the Find/Replace function in Word can save you time by cleaning up a document – making double spaces single, replacing particular words, making spaced hyphens spaced en dashes and so on.

At a slightly more advanced level you can use Wildcards (Advanced Find/Replace) to make more sweeping changes, such as replacing hyphens with dashes in number ranges, or adding tags to styled paragraphs. You can also make changes to colours and styles of text, or swap between sentence case and title case, add italics and bolds, and so on.

Find/Replace should always be used with care – and be especially careful when making global changes. Most experienced editors will have horror stories to recount about times they used it overzealously.

(For example, universally changing 'ize' to 'ise' would change 'size' to 'sise'. Changing hyphens to en dashes in number ranges will also affect URLs. Or consider the pain of having changed 'tin' to 'pan' when Americanising a book on baking – and all the inadvertent changes that might have entailed, such as 'heapang' ...)

Building phrases and predictive text

Are you always typing the same phrases in comments to authors? Writing the same kinds of emails? TextExpander and PhraseExpress are examples of apps that can help, by building longer phrases from snippets of text – effectively finishing your sentences for you.

Increasingly, email programs also offer predictive text functions, which can save time. You can also save templates for emails, such as stock responses to particular enquiries, cover emails at the end of a project, or questions for self-publishing authors.

Word styles and templates

Applying styles to headings and paragraph types in Word documents can save time, especially when you're working with long documents. As well as defining different heading weights, you can quickly and easily make global changes to styles, and also add tags to styled paragraphs.

Attaching a template to a Word document will give you access to a predefined range of styles, enabling you to match or replicate an existing document. There's plenty of information available online on getting the most out of using styles and templates in Word.

Keyboard shortcuts

As we've seen, often significant time savings can be achieved by making small changes that add up to a larger overall effect. Investigate and customise keyboard shortcuts to make your editing life easier.

Shortcuts are especially helpful for frequently used actions or processes to avoid having to click through menus and submenus, and also for inserting special characters in text. Common examples include:

- ctrl-S for 'Save'
- ctrl-C/ctrl-V for 'Copy/Paste'
- ctrl-Z for 'Undo' (possibly the most useful shortcut of all).

Shortcuts vary between PCs and Macs, and it's possible to make your own within various applications to suit your workflow. Combine them with macros to maximise efficiency.

Sources of knowledge and best practice

Remaining competitive as an editor depends on keeping up to date. As well as formal training, a good source of information for CIEP members is our forum, where editors often share questions, tips and tricks on working efficiently, including in a dedicated Macros forum.

Social media such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn can be great sources of up-to-date knowledge and best practice. The CIEP's local groups are also excellent and informal places to discuss ways of working.

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Make Word work for you

The CIEP offers online training in using Word efficiently for editing. A participant described the course as 'a must for anyone who wants to use computer-aided techniques within Word to make their editing more effective and efficient'.

ciep.uk/training/choose-a-course/word-practical-editing

Summary

- Assess the work.
- Create a strategy.
- Use key tools or a combination of tools to speed up and automate tasks.
- Use tools to check for consistency at the end of a job.
- Keep learning to stay competitive.

Resources

Word for Practical Editing (online course), ciep.uk/training/choose-a-course/word-practical-editing.

Geoff Hart, *Effective Onscreen Editing*, 4th edition, lulu.com/shop/geoff-hart/effective-onscreen-editing-4th-edition/paperback/product-24029836.html (CIEP member discount available).

Jack Lyon, *Wildcard Cookbook for Microsoft Word*, editorium.com/archive/wildcard-cookbook-for-microsoft-word.

Office Support, 'Customize or create new styles', support.office.com/en-gb/article/customize-or-create-new-styles-d38d6e47-f6fc-48eb-a607-1eb120dec563.

Office Support, 'Find and replace text', support.office.com/en-us/article/find-and-replace-text-c6728c16-469e-43cd-afe4-7708c6c779b7.

Office Support, 'Keyboard shortcuts in Word', support.office.com/en-gb/article/keyboard-shortcuts-in-word-95ef89dd-7142-4b50-afb2-f762f663ceb2.

Paul Beverley, *Macros for Editors*, archivepub.co.uk/book.html.

PerfectIt, intelligentediting.com (and see the Video Tutorials page on the website).

PerfectIt Courses, Cadman Training Services, cadmantraining.com (CIEP members are entitled to a discount).

TextExpander, textexpander.com.

Allen Wyatt's Word Tips site and emails, word.tips.net.

Written by the CIEP information team

The Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading (CIEP) is a non-profit body promoting excellence in English-language editing. We set and demonstrate editorial standards, and we are a community, training hub and support network for editorial professionals – the people who work to make text accurate, clear and fit for purpose.



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