

50 FIRST EDITS

You will use these steps over and over and over...

1. Have your grammar resources at hand: books, notes, handouts, and websites up on your computer screen.
2. Print out your work; the screen is deceiving and tiring for your eyes.
3. Read your work out loud. Record it if you want and play it back. Do this when you can be alone and have quiet.
4. Read from the end to the beginning. I don't advocate actually reading the words backwards, but start from the end or a different spot instead of the beginning.
5. Use a ruler or a piece of paper to scan one line at a time.
6. Work undisturbed. You'll lose track of where you are. Carve out time to edit when you can be completely alone and free of distractions.
7. Use the Word file I provided on your resource CD to search for duplicate words. Change or remove when words are too close together or overused.
8. When you read out loud, visually inspect for homonyms. "She peaked through the blinds and noticed the peek of Mt. Rainier."
9. Use a spell checker.
10. Don't depend on a spell checker.
11. Know how and when to use ellipses. ► Ellipses
12. Know how to use an –en dash properly. ►
13. Know how to use an —em dash properly. ►
14. Know how to format time. ►
15. Format numbers correctly. ►
16. When using exact numbers or counts, use –more than. When using inexact amounts, use –over.
17. Only use one space between sentences.
18. Use contractions—they're natural in our everyday speech.
19. Limit the use of –only.
20. Avoid words like –for some reason, whatever reason, actually, etc. They say nothing.
21. Avoid clichés *like the plague*.
22. Be careful of any or all absolutes. "I've never heard a story like that before."
23. Don't use adjectives to modify adjectives. ►
24. Remove meaningless or pet words like: very, just, really, so, manage to, kind of, finally, that, yet.

25. Use afterward, not afterwards. (British add s)
26. Use toward, not towards. (British add s)
27. Learn proper use of dashes and hyphens. ►
28. Search for and cleanup passive use: has, was, has been. ►
29. Ground refers to outside. Floor refers to inside.
30. Check all references to movies, TV shows, books, sitcoms, periodicals, articles, and apply proper formatting. Also check for permissions needed. ►
31. Know how to quote scripture. ►
32. Always use a comma in a list of items after the last item and before the word –and. Red, white, and blue.
33. A comma is always used before the word –but.
34. Learn when to use –that or –which and when to use a comma. ►
35. Do a search for single and double apostrophes and make sure they are used properly: it’s for it is, John’s for possessive, hasn’t for has not. ►
36. Check that subjects and verbs agree in number. ►
37. Be sure any sentence with an introductory clause that includes an –ing word relates to what immediately follows. ►
38. Any time a different person speaks during a dialogue, start a new paragraph.
39. Start a new paragraph each time the camera shifts from one person to another or one scene to another. Think of a TV show; every time the camera shot changes, someone else is talking or something new is happening.
40. Use single sentence paragraphs for effect—but don’t over use.
41. Check all use of quotation marks. ►
42. Be chintzy with use of the exclamation mark! Your writing should be clear so it’s not needed.
43. Check all capitalization. Be sure you use –mom when you can’t replace it with an actual name. “Yesterday, my mom came to visit me.” Use –Mom when you can replace it with an actual name. “Yesterday, Mom (Jenny) came to visit me.”
44. Watch the use of present participles; phrases with –ing words. It indicates simultaneous action. ►
45. Eliminate inconsistent grammatical structure when listing items. It’s awkward for readers. If you use parallel grammatical structure, the sentence is clear. Wrong: “Jane’s job includes sorting mail, to answer the phone, and to run errands. Correct: “Jane’s job includes sorting mail, answering the phone, and running errands.”
46. When a noun and a relationship refer to the same person, separate with commas. “My husband, John, worked near the hospital.”
47. Use sleek sentences; plain and succinct is better. We don’t speak flowery. Show; don’t tell while eliminating extra words. “The leak in the bottom of the boat was a result of crew members not maintaining it properly.” Better: “The boat leaked because the crew didn’t maintain it properly.”

48. If you use ladies, contrast it with gentlemen. If you use women, contrast it with men. Watch opposites for contextual relationship.
49. Learn how to format interior thoughts. ►
50. Take breaks.