Self-Editing Checklist – The Basics

New draft? New reviewer? Start here!

1. Go back to your notes on the solicitation or the scoring rubric. Circle each part of your essay where you answer a question from the solicitation.
   a. Do you answer all the questions?
   b. Do you use specific examples or vague statements to answer questions?
   c. Do you spend roughly equal amounts of page time on similarly-weighted questions?

2. Does the first paragraph introduce and summarize your proposal?
   a. Does it provide some background information?
   b. Does the first sentence provide a hook?
   c. Does the first sentence make you want to keep reading?
   d. Could a reviewer read just this paragraph and understand what your project is about?

3. Does the last paragraph summarize your proposal and its main points?
   a. Does it hint at what might come next?
   b. If a reviewer only remembered this paragraph, could they answer the review criteria?

4. Does the last sentence of each paragraph transition to the next via a related thought or topic?
   a. Words like "however," "therefore," "despite," and "similar" can be useful ways to develop a transition.
   b. Subheadings – especially in science – reduce the need for in-text transitions.

5. Let someone else read your essay.
   a. Your advisor.
   b. Someone in your field.
   c. Someone in an unrelated field.
   d. A family member.
   e. Grants and fellowships consultants! In person or by email at **gradgrants@nd.edu**.

Self-Editing Checklist – Advanced Version

Use these criteria for more polished drafts.

1. Go to the bottom of your essay. Read backwards, sentence by sentence. Look for:
   a. Missing words
   b. Misspelled words, especially homophones. E.g. Their vs there
   c. Repeated words or phrases
   d. Awkward phrasing
2. If you are highlighting in-text content, copy and paste **bold**/*italic* portions into a new document.
   a. Is it less than a paragraph of content total?
   b. Are any of these statements vague?
   c. Is any information repeated?
   d. Could someone read *just this information* and understand the outline and importance of your project?
3. Do you repeat words in the same paragraph or big-ticket words in the same essay?
4. Do you vary your sentence length?
5. Do multiple sentences or paragraphs start with the same word?
6. Have you defined your acronyms and topic-specific terms?
   a. If you introduce an acronym, is it always used after the definition?
   b. Are acronyms used more than once? If an acronym only appears once after the definition, consider using the full name instead.
   c. Are you consistent with your acronym formatting? E.g. U.S.A. vs USA?
   d. Do you use similar acronyms for unrelated items? E.g. pTBA and PBTA?
7. Remove all double-spaces (not the same as double-spacing).
8. Find all hyphens and em-dashes. Make sure they are formatted consistently, including length and spaces before and after.
9. If you need extra space for content and have a page limit:
   a. Do not change the font, font size, kerning, or margins! You will be disqualified from most competitions.
   b. Target paragraphs where 1-2 words are on a separate line. Changing a few words in that paragraph will gain a line.
   c. Remove spaces between paragraphs.
   d. **Subheading.** Consider formatting subheadings and sections on the same line like this.
10. If you squint at the page, does your essay appear to be a wall of text, or can you spot clearly defined sections and breaks? Breaks can come from:
    a. Short paragraphs
    b. Subheadings
    c. Figures and tables
11. Do not touch your essay for 24 hours – 1 week. Read it with fresh eyes.
12. Let someone else read your essay.
    a. Your advisor.
    b. Someone in your field.
    c. Someone in an unrelated field.
    d. A family member.
    e. Grants and fellowships consultants! In person or by email at **gradgrants@nd.edu**.