

Dear Editor,

Congratulations on being hired as an editor by one of my students! I hope you find this a rewarding experience.

The reason I have asked my students to hire an editor is that while I love teaching writing classes, I don't do well finding time to mark their papers, which can often result in a backlog of unmarked papers—not good for me or for them. Therefore, I have asked them to find someone else who can edit their papers, leaving me free to read and enjoy a more perfected final version. However, I do have some suggestions for you as you begin this job.

IEW students use a checklist of specific techniques that they must include in each paragraph of each composition, and this gradually becomes more complex over the course of the year. Perhaps the most important idea for you to keep in mind is this: The primary purpose of the checklist isn't to create better writing—it is to create better writers. When we require students to use particular words, grammatical constructions, and sentence patterns, they become more familiar with a wider range of ways of using words and constructing sentences. This is good. Unfortunately, however, this sometimes stretches a student, and can consequently cause their writing to seem forced or awkward. Don't worry. Awkwardness is normal when learning a new technique. Gradually it will become more natural.

Therefore, I ask that you take a minimalist approach to editing. Make it “legal,” but don't worry if it's as “good” as you think it should be. Please edit mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, spelling) so that the paper is basically correct. Do feel free to change a word to a better one if the one used simply doesn't make sense, and do rephrase sentences as necessary for them to be complete and grammatically sound. But beyond that, please don't make any significant changes to the content. Just edit, don't rewrite.

My students should always double-space their papers, which will allow room for your editing marks and changes. If they give you a paper that is not double-spaced, please remind them to always do so in the future.

Lastly, I would suggest that you make necessary changes on their paper (with a different color of pen) and return the paper to the student with a smile—no lecture attached. Don't explain why you made the changes you made (unless the student asks you), and let him or her recopy the paper with your edits, receiving the grammar lesson implicitly. Hopefully one edit and rewrite will be sufficient; however, from time to time a re-edit and a second rewrite may be appropriate.

Thank you for your willingness to help. I also hope my student provides appropriate compensation to you for your time. Please feel free to contact me directly with any questions or concerns.

Laura Jones