

The 5-minute guide to the 7 most useful software tools for correcting, cleaning up, and polishing what you write in minutes.

Extra-marital sex or extra marital sex? That little hyphen could cost you everything. Professionals who write know it's the little things like hyphens and commas and missing letters that cause the most confusion, embarrassment, and sometimes a lawsuit. Sure, everyone reads it through one more time and does a spell check. What else is there? Lots. To begin, here are seven mostly free or inexpensive state-of-the-art software tools professional copy editors use to eradicate errors and polish up your text with next to no effort.

@Voice Aloud Reader



When you read your own writing, your eyes tend to see what your brain *thinks* should be there and you can skim right past what turn out to be glaring mistakes. *Listening* to someone read out loud what you wrote is like standing in the shoes of the reader. If there is a word wrong or a spelling or grammatical error, you are going to hear it when you would not see it.

@Voice Aloud Reader is one of several text-to-speech apps. It's a free download, installs in minutes and is super easy to use. Listen to your email, memo, or report on your commute to or from work or while enjoying a coffee at your favorite café. @ Voice Aloud runs on Android so download it from Google Play Store to your mobile or tablet.

MS Word spell check



MS Word, the program everyone loves to hate. Spell Check will catch most of the obvious errors and if you turn on the grammar check it will catch a few more. What it will not do is catch contextual errors or flag what is missing.

*Eye halve a spelling chequer
It came with my pea sea*

*It plainly marques four my revue
Miss steaks eye kin knot sea.*

*Eye have run this poem threw it
I am shore your pleased two no
Its letter perfect in it's weigh
My chequer tolled me sew.*

Need I say more?

PerfectIt from Intelligent Editing



PerfectIt is like having your own personal proofreader on call 24/7. It picks up all the little inconsistencies in hyphenation, bullet point and list punctuation, spelling (program here, programme there), flags all your abbreviations, looks for missing quotation marks and brackets, checks for consistent use of capitals in the text and in headings, and a dozen other things it would take you hours to find manually and still miss a few. If the 'devil is in the details', PerfectIt is The Exorcist. You can download a free, easy-to-install, full-feature 14-day trial at this link: <http://www.intelligentediting.com/> No credit card information required.

WordRake



WordRake will 'declutter' your text in no time flat. It takes only a minute to process 240,000 English words and all their permutations and flags all those 'unnecessary words' you hear writing guru's talk about. Then you go through the text and click 'accept' or 'reject'. This is what people mean when they talk about 'polishing' your writing. Here is a sample:

~~There was nothing that~~ [Nothing] occurred during ~~the course of~~ this investigation that ~~gave rise to~~ [caused] any concern about her eligibility.

Try the full-feature 7-day free trial here: <https://www.wordrake.com/> You will get an email with a link to the download page. No credit card information required.

SmartEdit



SmartEdit is "a first-pass editing tool for creative writers and novelists" but professionals who write will also find it useful. For example, most of us are unaware of the repeated phrases and words we tend to use. SmartEdit will tell you exactly how many times you have used 'moreover' and 'in order to'. Novice or skilled writer, SmartEdit is worth the 10-day full-feature free trial at this link: <http://www.smart-edit.com/> No credit card information required.

Grammar Checkers

The problem most people have with grammar checkers is you have to be a grammar geek to understand the message. Here is what I do when I get a message I don't understand:

- Ignore the message. You will be OK more than 50 percent of the time.
- Ask Google. Everything you need to know about grammar is on the Internet.
- Ask a friend or someone at work.

Grammarly



Grammarly is probably the most widely known grammar checker. The free version offers:

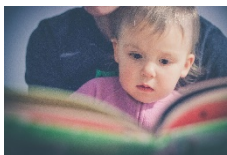
- 150 critical grammar and spelling checks
- 100+ additional advanced grammar and spelling checks
- Vocabulary enhancement suggestions (Suggesting a better word)

The premium version offers 'additional features' but you probably don't need them. I reject about seventy-five percent of the 'errors' Grammarly flags, but every now and then it catches something I would have missed so it's worth the few minutes it takes to check. Did you catch my error in that last sentence?

Other programs worth a free trial:

- CorrectEnglish Complete
- Ginger
- SpellCheckPlus Pro
- WhiteSmoke

Readability scores



'Readability' is a measure of how easy or difficult one person finds it to understand a text. This matters when you are writing for that 'general audience' you want to read your brochures, blogs and policy briefs. If you are using MS Word, go to File/Options/Proofing and under 'When correcting grammar and spelling in Word' click 'Check grammar with spelling'. At the end of your spell check, you will get a box showing 'Readability Statistics'. Look at the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease score and the grade level. A score of 1 indicates 'very difficult' text and 100 'very easy'. For your 'general audience', aim for a score of 60-70 and a grade level of nine.

Some audiences require you to meet specific readability standards. For example, the US Department of the Army Publishing Program guidelines say, "Include reading grade level data

based on Kincaid Readability Formula". Try running your text through some of the tests listed in "How Do I Decide Which Readability Formula or Formulas to Use on My Document?" at this link:

<http://www.readabilityformulas.com/articles/how-do-i-decide-which-readability-formula-to-use.php>

Questions? Want to know more?



Please feel welcome to contact me if you have any questions about these or other programs, tips, tricks and techniques for correcting, cleaning up and polishing your writing. You can email me at clayton@redplough.com

Join my LinkedIn network: [linkedin.com/in/terryerleclayton](https://www.linkedin.com/in/terryerleclayton)

Want to know more? Get my latest book "Beyond Spell Check". See why professional copyeditors charge so much. See how easy it would be for you to use these same tips, tricks, tools and techniques.

Photo Credits: Pixabay CC0 Creative Commons. Free for commercial use.

Disclaimer: Terry Erle Clayton is not acting in any capacity on behalf of any of the companies mentioned in this article and receives no remuneration in cash or kind from any vendor or third party.