

How to Copy Edit a Story?

1. **Pull all of the elements of the story together.**

There's the copy, caption(s), headlines, and any refers or breakout boxes. You want to be able to crosscheck all of these elements against each other.

2. **Read the story.**

Are the byline and dateline correct? Look for bad or missing punctuation, grammar or spelling errors, incomplete sentences, repeating words ("the the"), AP stylebook (if that's what your publication uses), improper day references ("today," "yesterday"), etc. Double-check unfamiliar names and places. Be sure to run a spell check at the end your spelling skills may be excellent, but everyone makes mistakes.

3. **Let the writer keep his or her voice.**

You may encounter copy that is beyond awful, and rewriting good chunks may be necessary. But editors should also resist making changes not because something is wrong, but because they're adding a style or voice that they prefer.

4. **Edit the captions.**

Crosscheck names, places, events, organization titles, etc., against the story. Is there a discrepancy? Many correct answers can be found by checking with the reporter, calling sources, or looking on official Web sites. Run a spell check.

5. **Edit the headline.**

Make sure that the headline accurately reflects what the main point of the story is, and that any subhead develops off the main headline. Ensure that it reflects headline do's and don'ts. Run a spell check.

6. Is it really ready to go?

Don't file something as ready to go for print if, say, you're waiting on a phone call to confirm a fact in the story.

7. Review the final product.

If you're working at a paper, you'll want to review how the elements all came together on a page. Does any text run together, do captions fit the photos; have any fonts "blown out" (changed appearance) in the design process? If a story says it jumps to page four, have you checked to make sure the story does land there and the text correctly flows from the originating page to the jump page? Eyeball the headlines for one last spelling check.