

Polishing Your Writing

When we prepare our writing for others to read, we often *polish* it. In this sense, polishing writing is much like polishing our shoes when we dress up for a special occasion. We polish our shoes because we want to look our best. Similarly, because we want our writing to be its best, we polish it. And as important, in that polishing, we aim to make our writing as easy as possible for others to read.

There are several strategies for polishing writing; some of them are listed below. Try one or more of them to see which ones are most helpful to you as a writer.

Read Your Writing Aloud to Yourself

When we read our writing aloud, we can use two senses to see how well the writing is "working"—hearing and seeing. As you read, listen to see if your writing makes sense, if you've left out a word, or if you want to explain a bit more.

Read Your Writing Aloud to Someone Else

Sometimes we can't hear our own writing as well as someone else can, so it can be helpful to find a friend, family member, or colleague who can help us. Before you begin, you might ask your listener to pay attention to certain parts of your writing. Alternatively, you might ask your listener to see if the entire writing makes sense. But count on that person to hear what you can't!

Imagine Your Reader

Sometimes it's helpful to imagine the reader you have in mind because it's through imagining that person that you can find the perfect detail or expression. When writing a story for a child, for example, how will he or she react to your story? Is there a comparison you can make to something in their experience that will bring the story alive? When trying to persuade someone from the Town Council, can you link your point to a value he or she shares? Imagining the reader can be one way to decide which perfect detail to add to your writing.

Develop Your Own List of Trouble Spots for Attention

Strong writers often have their own list of trouble spots, typically a list that they use to guide their polishing. You'll want to have such a list, too. Are your sentences so long that they are hard to read? Or perhaps so short that one sentence doesn't seem very well connected to another? Do certain spelling words always seem to trip you up? Do you have difficulty with endings or beginnings? Do you drop the -ed on the ends of verbs? Whatever the trouble spot, put it on the list, and don't worry about it until you begin polishing. At that time, use the list as a guide.

