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# Top Ten Quality Assurance Checks To Make Before Your Document Goes Out The Door

by Mary Headley

If your company or nonprofit is like many others, you're writing that important document right up until it's time to send it out. A quality assurance review has not been built into the schedule and now you find yourself with neither the time nor the resources to do a full edit on that important document you worked so hard on. I would be the last person to encourage you to forego the critical quality assurance step. However, sometimes you are caught short—so what do you do? The good news is that doing a few editing passes in critical areas is better than doing nothing. So here are some tips to optimize the benefits of what you can do fairly quickly:

1. **Be sure there is an executive summary, abstract or introduction section.** Make sure there is a concise summary of what your document is all about and why people should read it, together with enough background information so the subject is clear, even to management and nontechnical readers. A common mistake is to dive right into a topic, especially a technical one, thereby losing many readers from the start. In longer documents, be sure to label the abstract/summary/introduction section as such so that it can be easily found by skimming.
2. **Be sure there is a conclusion or recommendations section.** Make sure your conclusion—research findings, recommended course of action, or whatever—are succinctly stated. Don't force people to read between the lines to find your closing message or call to action. Again, be sure to set this message off—or label this section in longer documents—so that it can be easily found by skimming.
3. **Carefully edit the summary/introduction and conclusion/recommendations sections.** Many people don't read much beyond these two sections, so make sure they are impeccable. Remember, first impressions do count, so you don't want embarrassing mistakes here.
4. **Edit document title, section headings, table/figure captions and figure labels.** Make sure these important areas are clean, as errors here are more obvious. Even people who are just skimming the rest of your document will tend to read these elements.
5. **Look for common errors and globally fix them.** Mistakes are often repeated—for example, if you have written “discreet” instead of “discrete” once, there's a good chance you may have made the same mistake again. When you spot such an error in one of the key areas mentioned above, use the power of your software's global search and replace function to quickly clean these up, even in sections you don't have the time to thoroughly edit.
6. **Check all numbers and dates.** Skim your document for dollar amounts, percentages, figures and dates; then verify, at a minimum, these are consistent (if you can easily do so, also verify they are correct). Numbers frequently change in the course of writing, and often don't get changed in all places; few things will damage your document's credibility more than inaccurate or inconsistent numbers. And if your document has an assigned part number or document number, make sure it is correct!

7. **Check for an appropriate copyright statement.** Help protect your organization's ownership rights to your document by including a copyright statement up front, checking with your organization's legal advisor, as appropriate. For example: *Copyright © 2005, Information Engineering Company. All rights reserved.*
8. **Check for correct product/company names and trademark statements.** Make sure your organization's name is spelled correctly and consistently throughout your document. For example, if your organization's name is *Company ABC, Inc.*, correct such variations as *ABC Company*. Similarly, if your organization has named products or programs, especially if written with unusual capitalizations (like *U\_NameIt*), make sure these are spelled correctly and consistently. If your organization has trademarked any of these names, be sure to include the appropriate trademark statement in the front of your document. For example: *U\_NameIt is a registered trademark of Company ABC, Inc.* Finally, if you mention names that belong to other companies/organizations, consider adding the following blanket statement to avoid potential problems: *Other names mentioned may be trademarks of other companies or organizations.*
9. **Verify document's structural integrity.** This includes checking that all pages are present (and in the right order), that there are no missing graphics (or graphics that run off a page) and that any running page headers and footers are correct. Also, if your document has a table of contents or index, check a few entries to verify that the page number references are accurate.
10. **Run your software's spell-checker program.** Even though spell-checker programs won't catch missing or misused words, they do flag many potential spelling errors very quickly, so be sure to do one final spell-check pass just before your document goes out the door.

Mary Headley performs editorial services for print documents and websites through her business, Information Engineering Company (<http://www.inform-engine.com>). She feels this article describes key quality assurance checks that are common to many business and technical documents, although there are many other edits to be done that are likely to greatly improve the overall quality of your document—edits that are specific to the particular type of document at hand and that are probably best done by a professional editor. Contact her for a free consultation to learn how you can make your next communication project more successful, regardless of the amount of time or budget you have available.