Editing Your Own Work

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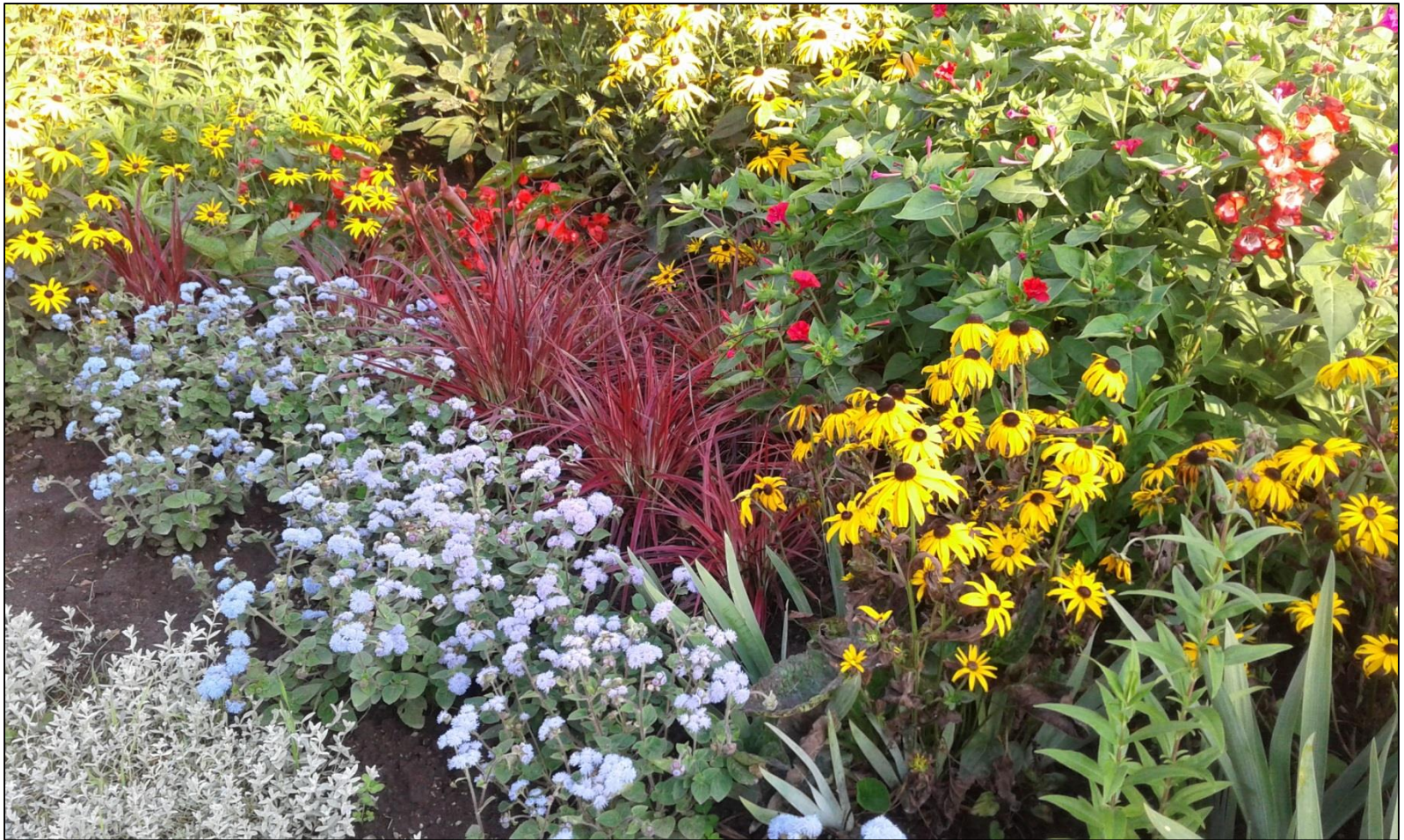InQuill Med Com
Medical Writing Network

https://medicalwritingnetwork.com

Editing Your Own Work:
Helping to Wow Reviewers and Aid Readers

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Overview

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- Background
- Preparing to edit your work
- General items to check for
- Checklists: editing papers and proposals
- Common problems to remedy
- Tips for non-native users of English
- Some items to look for when proofreading
- Some resources

A Little about My Background

Some Aspects of My Background

- Teacher of science writing and science editing
- Coordinator, science communication graduate program
- Former editor of *Science Editor*
- Lead author: *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper*
- Recipient of fellowship to evaluate EIS course
- It's good to be back!

How About You?

- What is your main professional role?
  - Epidemiologist?
  - Laboratory researcher?
  - Administrator?
  - Writer or editor?
  - Trainee?
  - Other?
- What kinds of writing of your own do you edit?

# Why bother editing your own work?

- Can increase likelihood of acceptance
  - By meeting criteria for content and style
  - By avoiding misinterpretation
  - By creating a good impression
- Can aid communication with readers
- Can minimize editing by others (and thus decrease likelihood of distortion)
- Other

The Essentials

- **Content**

- **Organization**

- **Clarity**

In editing one's own work, checking for these items is more important than polishing the language.

Preparing to Edit Your Work
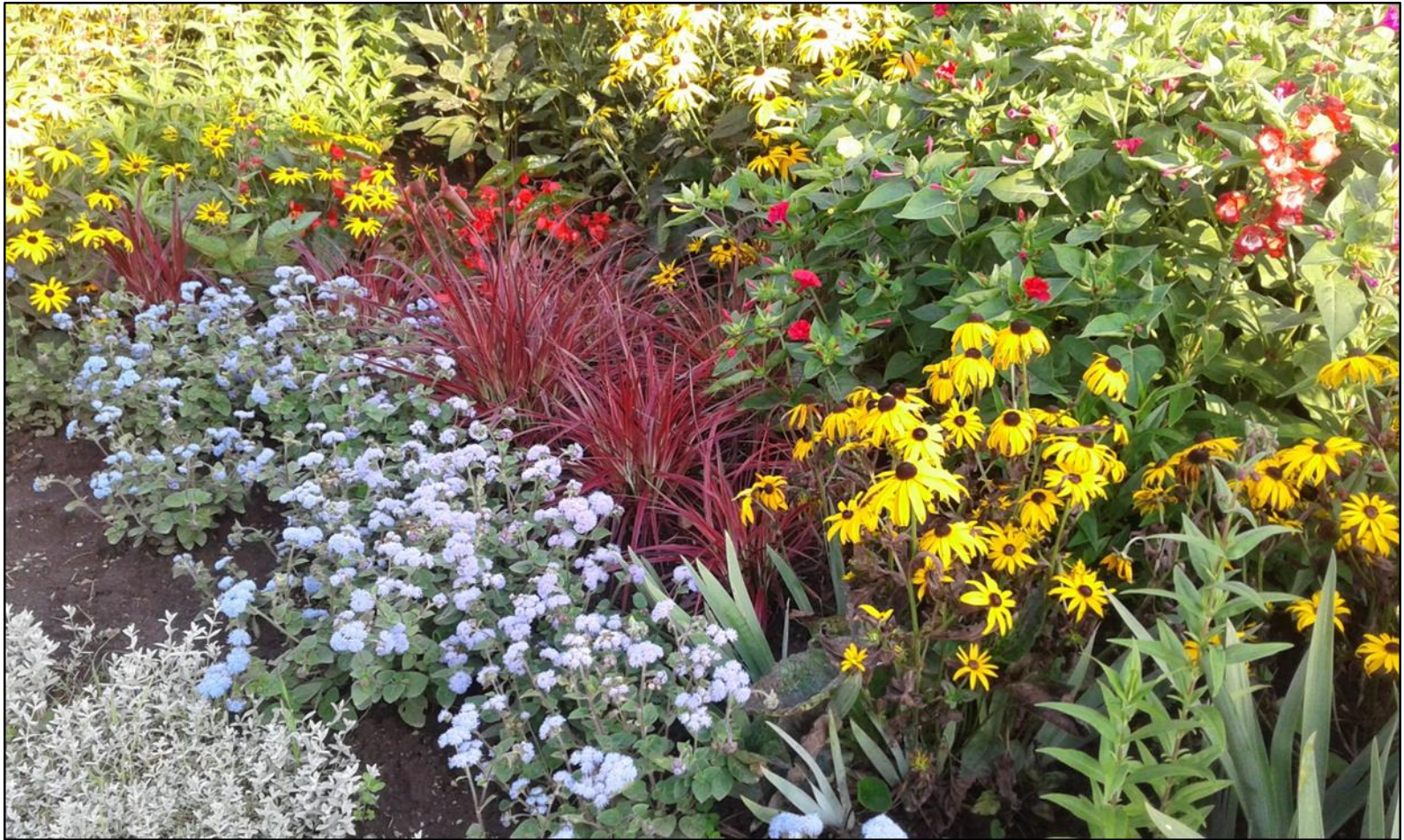
Gaining Sufficient Distance

- Setting the draft aside for a while
- Printing out the draft
  - Offers a fresh view
  - Helps in noticing macro-level aspects
- Changing the look of the draft—for example:
  - Changing the typeface
  - Increasing the margins
 - Printing the draft on colored paper
- Reading the draft aloud

Options: Editorial Approaches

- Order of components
  - Beginning to end
  - Tables and figures first
  - References first
- Scale
  - Macro (for example, overall organization) and then micro (for example, wording)
  - Micro and then macro
  - Alternation of macro and micro

Editing:
An Iterative Process

(commonly entails reviewing material
at least twice)

General Items to Check For
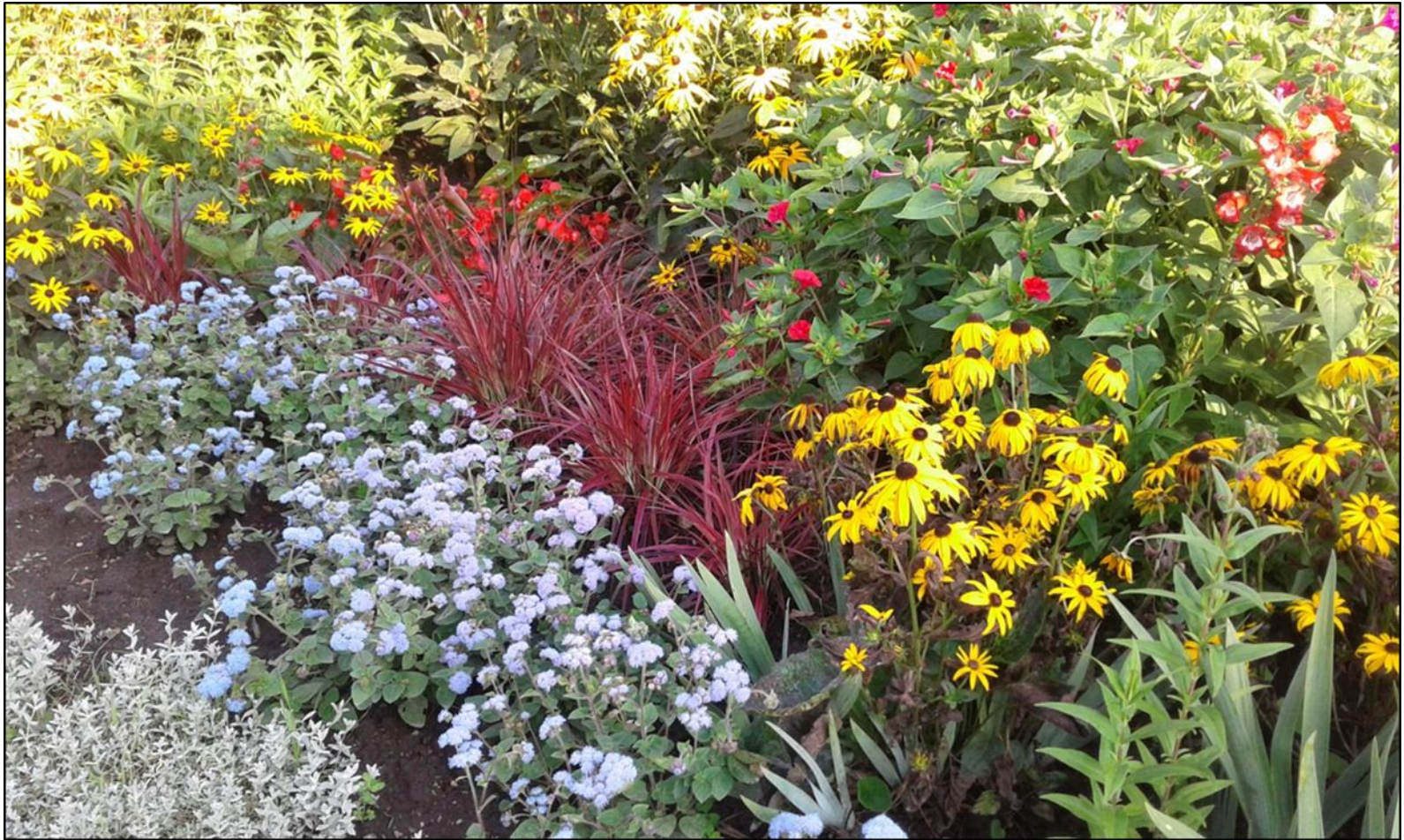
Items to Check: Crafting

1. Are ideas presented in a logical order?

2. Are there clear transitions from idea to idea?

3. Are overviews presented before details?

4. Are paragraphs an appropriate length?

5. Do paragraphs have strong topic sentences?

6. Are sentences an appropriate length?

7. Are grammar, spelling, punctuation, and word usage correct throughout?

8. Are the antecedents of all pronouns clear?

9. Are appropriate verb tenses used?

10. Are citations and references in the required formats?

Other Aspects to Check

1. Do the content and technical level suit the audience?
2. Is all the logic correct and clear?
3. Is the information consistent throughout?
4. Are all the tables and figures necessary?
5. Should any tables or figures be added?
6. Are all cited items listed in the reference list?
7. Are all items in the reference list cited in the text?
8. Are you comfortable with everything in the piece of writing?
9. If a checklist was provided, did you use it?
10. Have all instructions been followed?

Checklists: Editing Papers and Proposals
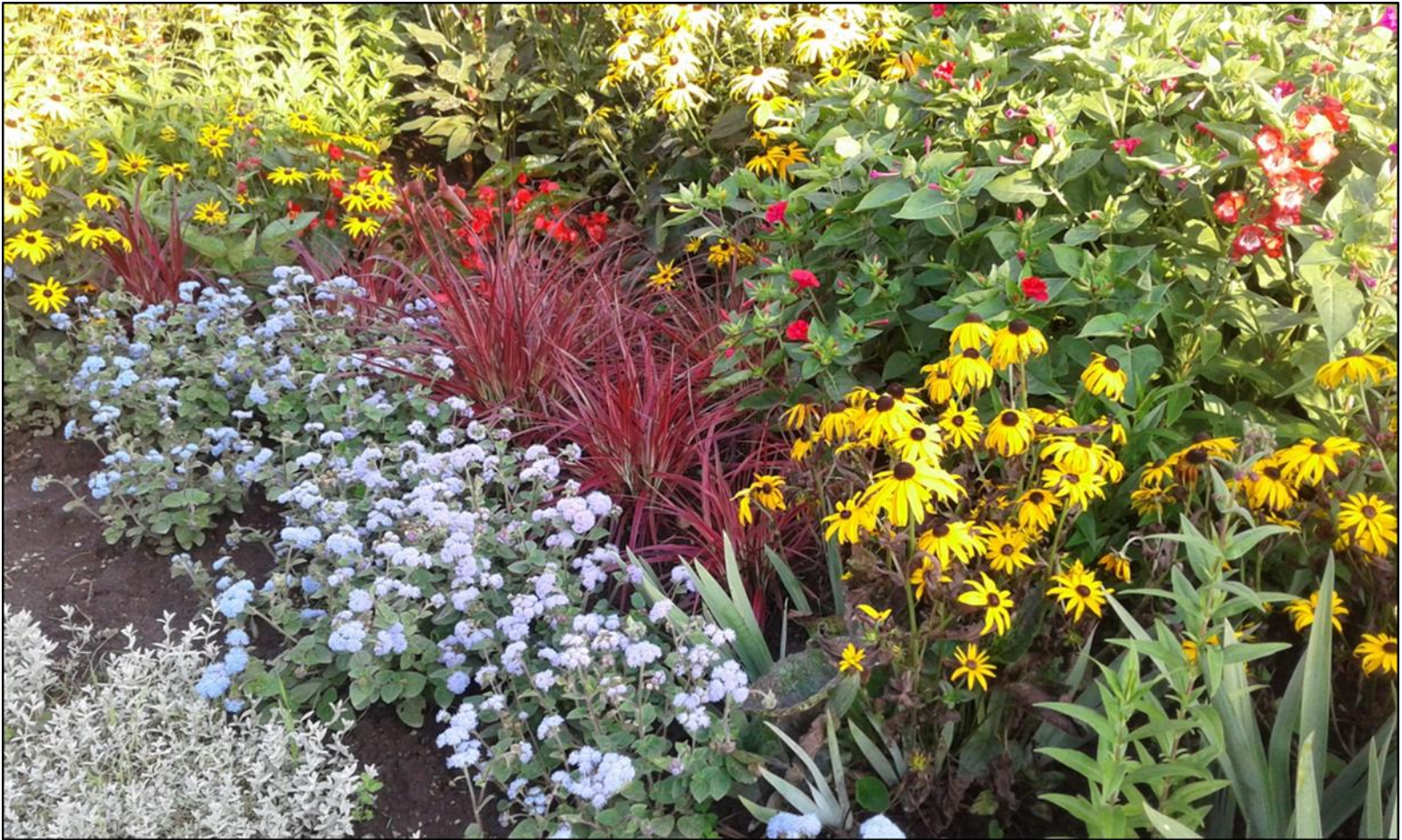
Scientific Papers: A Checklist

❑ Does the title accurately and concisely reflect the content?

❑ Are the appropriate people listed as authors?

❑ Does the introduction provide sufficient context?

❑ Does the introduction show what gap the research is to fill?

❑ Does the introduction indicate the hypotheses, research questions, or objectives?

❑ Does the methods section provide sufficient information to replicate the research?

❑ Does the methods section provide sufficient information to evaluate the research?

❑ Are sources of reagents, equipment, animals, etc identified?

Scientific Papers: A Checklist (cont)

❏ If humans or animals were studied, are approvals noted?

❏ Are the results presented in logical order?

❏ Are the results presented in appropriate detail?

❏ Were appropriate statistical methods used?

❏ Does the discussion address the research questions, hypotheses, or objectives posed in the introduction?

❏ Does the discussion put the results in sufficient context?

❏ If appropriate, does the discussion address strengths and limitations of the research?

❏ Are the appropriate parties acknowledged?

❏ Does the abstract accurately reflect the content of the paper?

Grant Proposals: A Checklist

❑ Are the goals, research questions, or hypotheses clear?

❑ Is the originality of the work apparent?

❑ Is the work clearly relevant to the funding source's mission?

❑ Is the importance of the proposed work explained?

❑ Is sufficient context provided?

❑ Is the amount of proposed work realistic?

❑ Are the people clearly capable of doing the proposed work?

❑ Are sufficient justifications provided for choices?

❑ Is sufficient supporting evidence included?

❑ Is sufficient justification provided for budgetary items?

Grant Proposals: A Checklist (cont)

❑ If there will be cost sharing, is sufficient information provided about it?

❑ If preliminary studies are required or advisable, is there enough information on them?

❑ If a timeline would be advisable, is one included?

❑ Should any tables or figures be added or deleted?

❑ If evaluation plans are needed, are they sufficient?

❑ If dissemination plans should be included, are they sufficient?

❑ Does the title clearly and accurately reflect the content?

❑ Is the abstract informative and clear?

❑ Is the proposal persuasive in all regards?

A Suggestion:
Customize these checklists for your own use.

For discussion or reflection:

If you were to adapt one of these checklists for your own use, what is something that you would add or delete?

Common Problems to Remedy
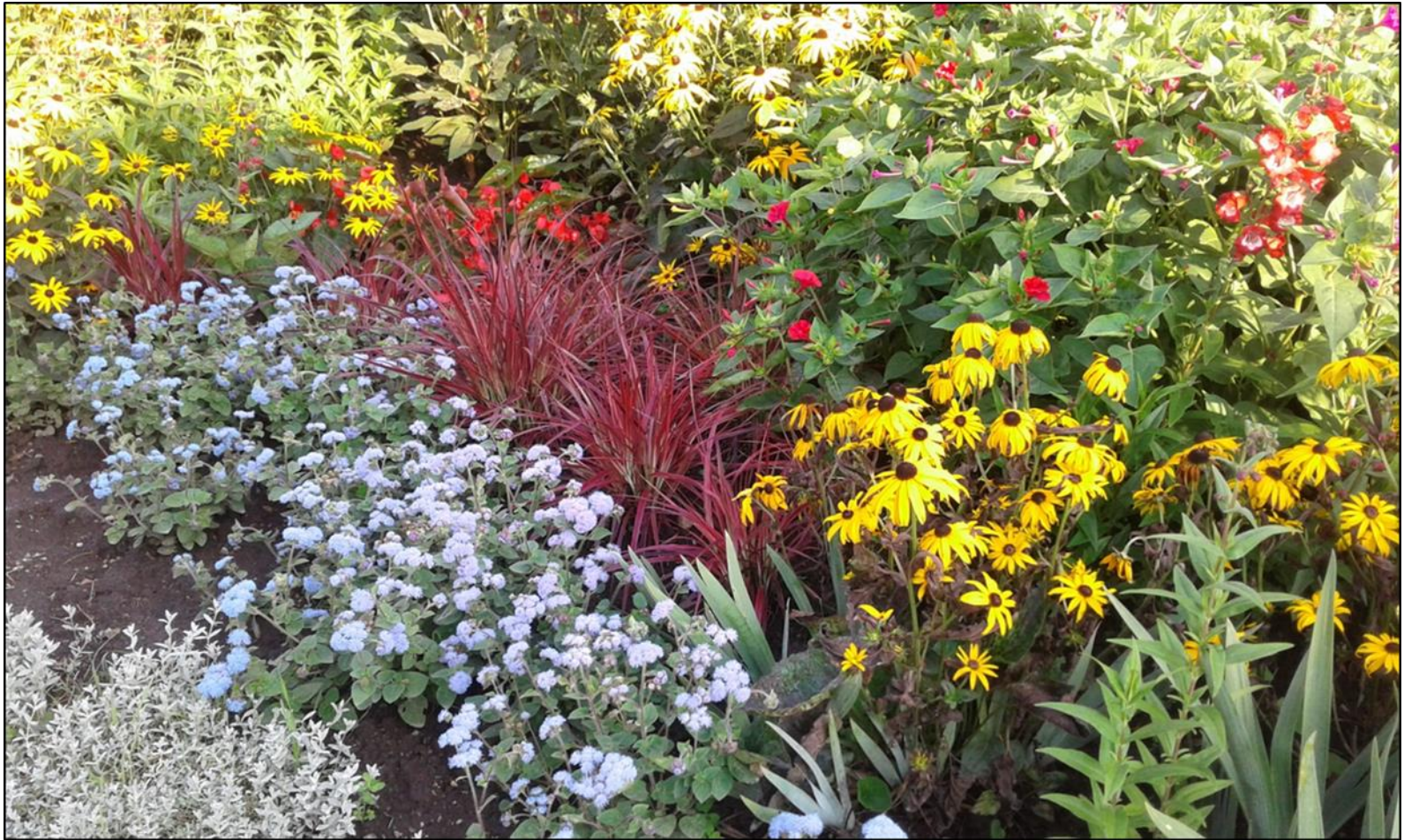
Common Problems to Remedy

- Disregard of instructions
- Inattention to good models
- Lack of focus
- Excessive redundancies
- Failure to make reasoning explicit
- Poor parallelism

- Excessive use of acronyms (especially newly coined ones)
- Undefined acronyms
- Overly long and convoluted sentences
- Excessive jargon
- Pompous wording
- Wordiness

Exercise: Condensing Wording

Absolutely essential ➤ Essential

An adequate amount of ➤ Enough

Are of the same opinion ➤ Agree

At the present time ➤ Now

Consensus of opinion ➤ Consensus

Despite the fact that ➤ Although

Fellow colleague ➤ Colleague

Has the potential to ➤ Can

In an efficient manner ➤ Efficiently

Exercise: Condensing Wording

In most instances	➢ Usually
In the event that	➢ If
Is similar to	➢ Resembles
The majority of	➢ Most
On a daily basis	➢ Daily
Take into consideration	➢ Consider
Whether or not to	➢ Whether to
Was of the opinion that	➢ Believed
Needless to say	➢ [Well, then don't say it]

Tips for Non-Native English Users
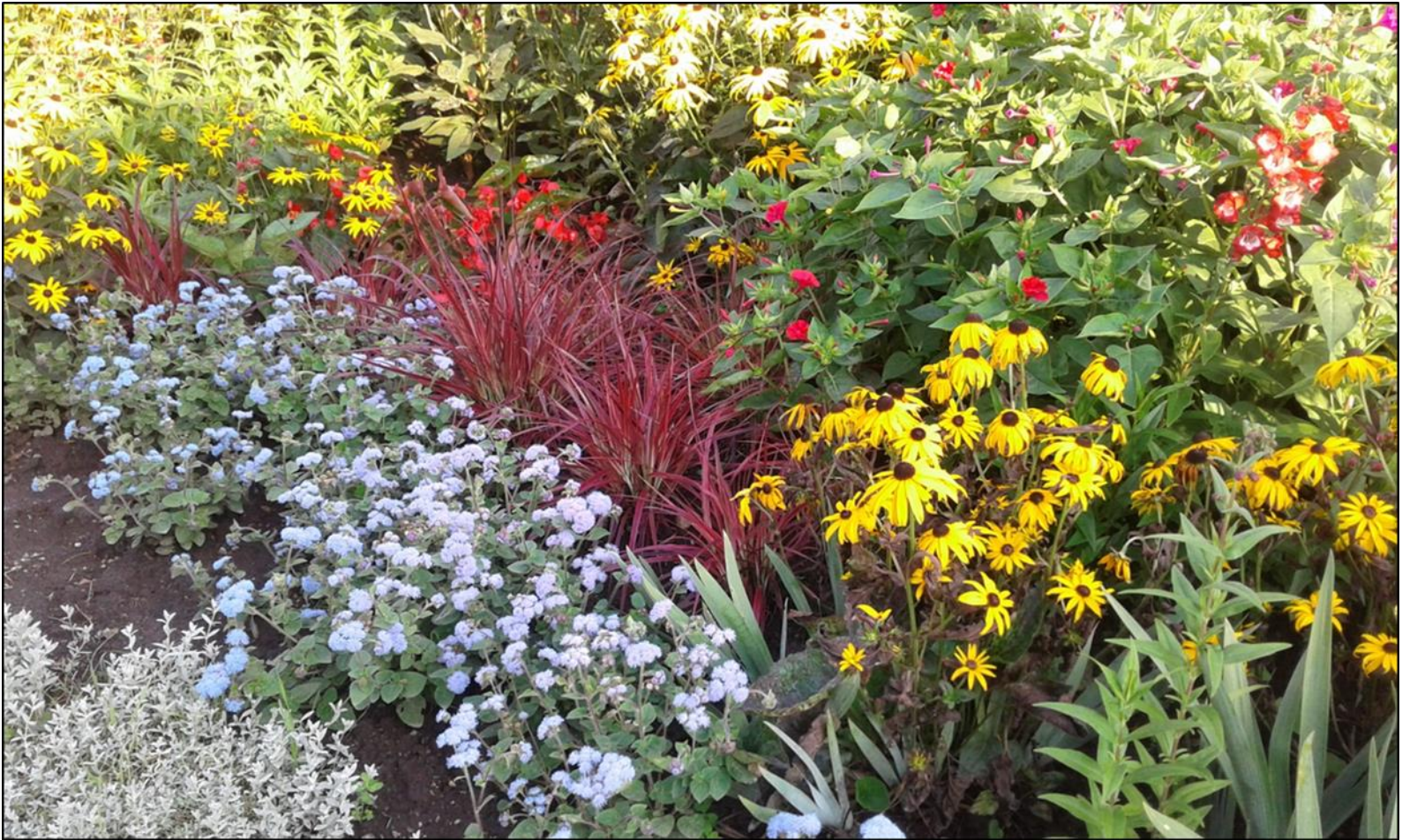
Tips for Non-Native English Users

- Remember: Content, clarity, and organization are key.

- Prepare a personal glossary of common terms and phrases in your research area.

- Be alert for aspects of English that tend to pose problems (for example, articles, prepositions, verb tenses).

- Be aware of English-language norms for sentence structure and sentence length.

- Realize that writing in English is more direct than that in some other languages.

- Take special care to avoid plagiarism.

- Check spacing when proofreading your work.

Some Items to Look for When Proofreading
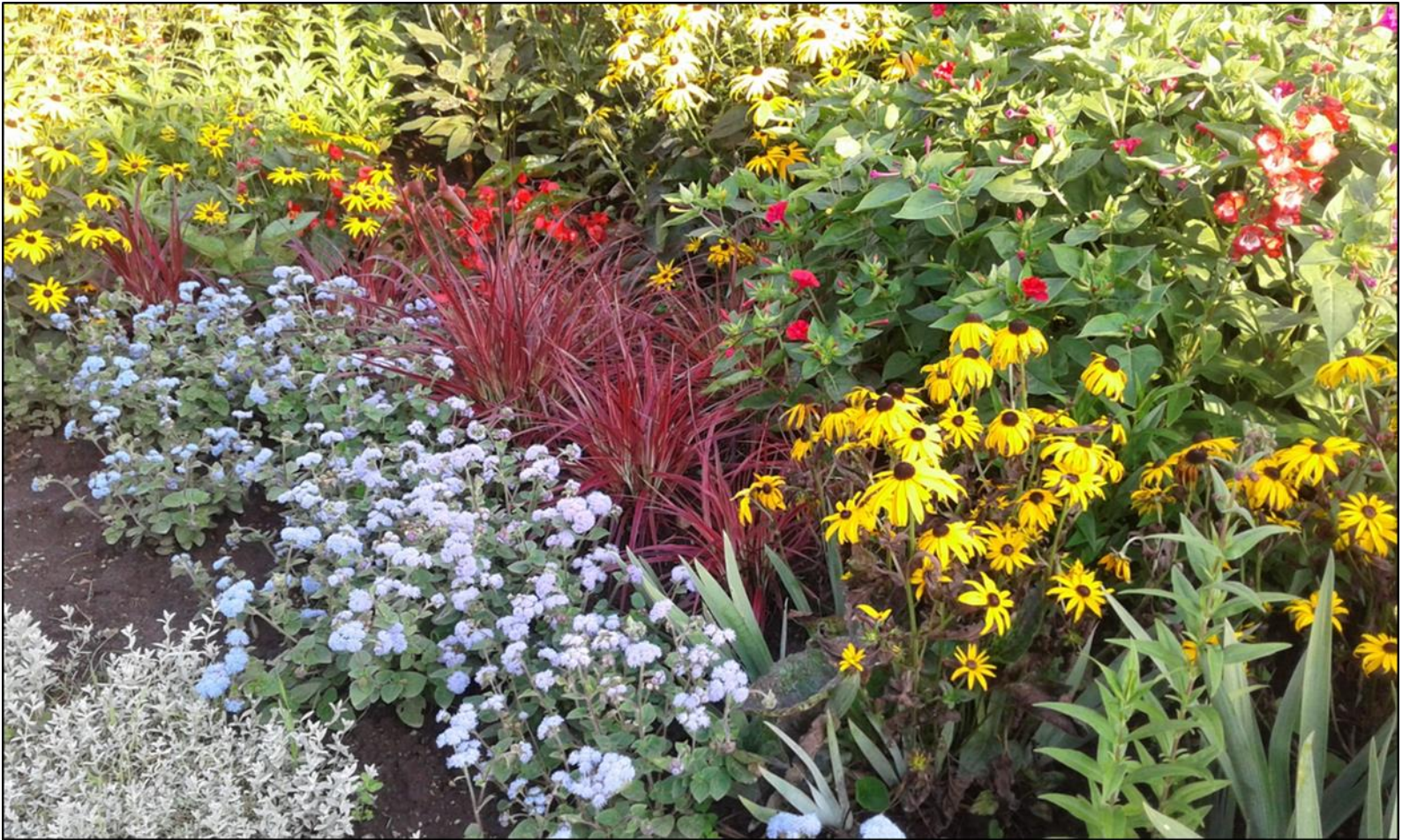
Some Items to Look for When Proofreading

- Typographical errors—for example:
  - Misspellings that mysteriously appeared
  - Greek letters that have turned into squiggles
- Incorrect typefaces or type sizes
- Spacing   errors
- Incorrect placement of graphics

Some Resources

OneLook Dictionary Search (http://www.onelook.com/)
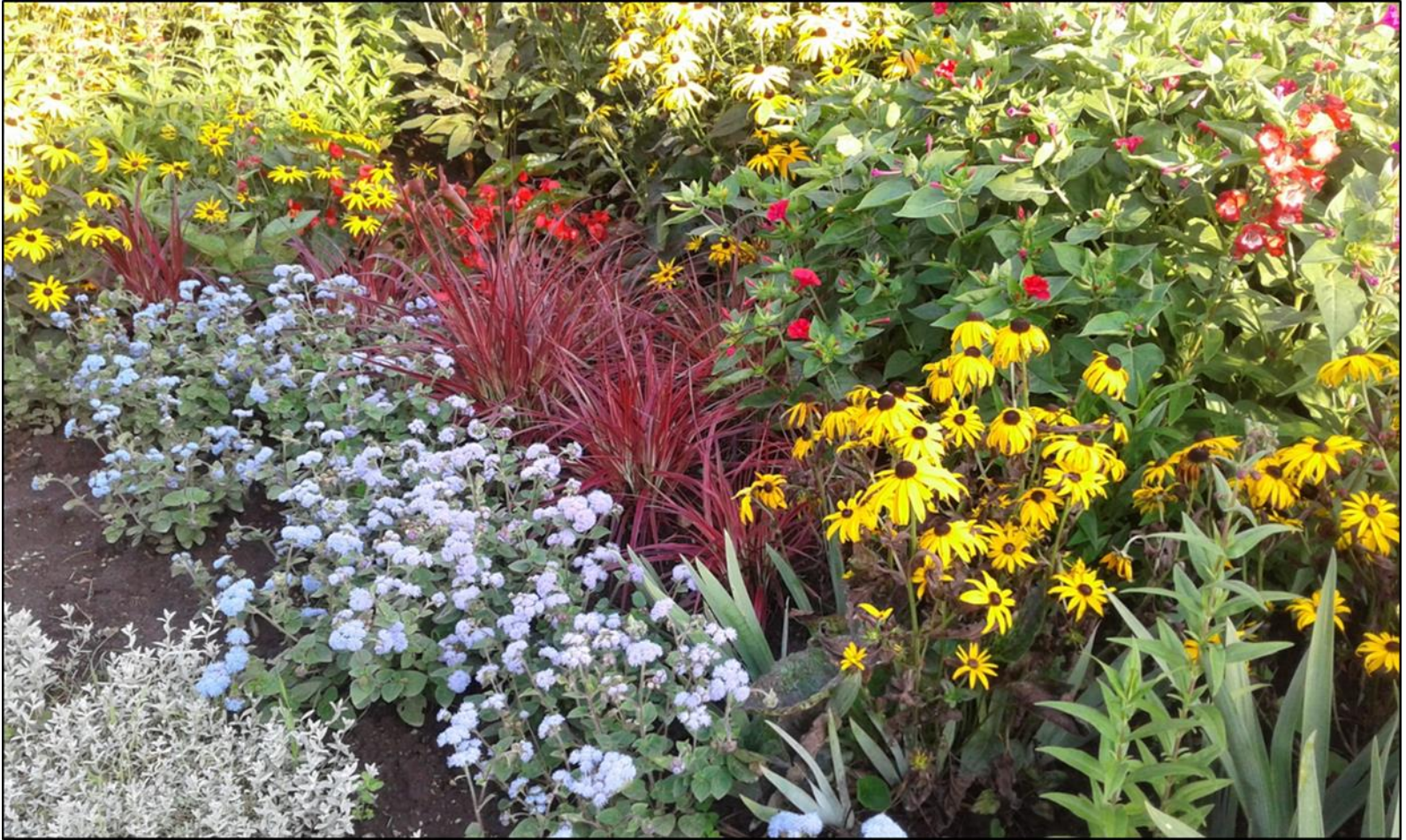
OneLook
Dictionary Search

Word, phrase, or pattern: [   ] [Search]

Example searches

bluebird	Find definitions of *bluebird*
blue*	Find words and phrases that start with *blue*
*bird	Find words and phrases that end with *bird*
bl????rd	Find words that start with *bl*, end with *rd*, with 4 letters in between
bl*:snow	Find words that start with *bl* and have a meaning related to *snow*
bl*:adjective	Find any adjectives that start with *bl*
*:snow or :snow	Find any words related to *snow*
*:winter sport	Find words related to the concept *winter sport*
winter	Find phrases that contain the word *winter*
expand:nasa	Find phrases that spell out *n.a.s.a.*

Advanced help with wildcards and the reverse dictionary is available.

19,633,003 words in 1061 dictionaries indexed —
Today's word is **exposition**

Reverse Dictionary   Browse Dictionaries   Privacy   Blog   Help

g+1 1.5k

Basic Punctuation (Handout)

(https://www.uvu.edu/writingcenter/docs/handouts/grammar/basicpunctuation.pdf)

Basic Punctuation

WRITING CENTER

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Correct punctuation is essential for clear and effective writing. The following list contains some of the most critical punctuation rules.

Commas

Commas separate parts of a sentence. They tell readers to pause between words, and they can clarify the meanings of sentences.

- Commas are used to separate three or more words or phrases in a series.
    - EXAMPLE: Practice will be held **before school, in the afternoon, and at night.**

- Commas are used after introductory words and introductory dependent clauses (groups of words before the subject of a sentence that do not form complete sentences).
    - EXAMPLES: **If your friends enjoy Chinese food**, they will love this restaurant.
        Incidentally, I was not late this morning.
        Hoping for a bigger fish, Rob spent three more hours fishing.

- Commas are used between **independent clauses** joined by a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*).
    - EXAMPLE: My dog had fleas, so we gave him a bath.

Academic Phrasebank
(http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/)

25 Ways to Tighten Your Writing

(https://www.prdaily.com/25-ways-to-tighten-your-writing/)

AuthorAID
(https://www.authoraid.info/en/)

For the Editors Among You
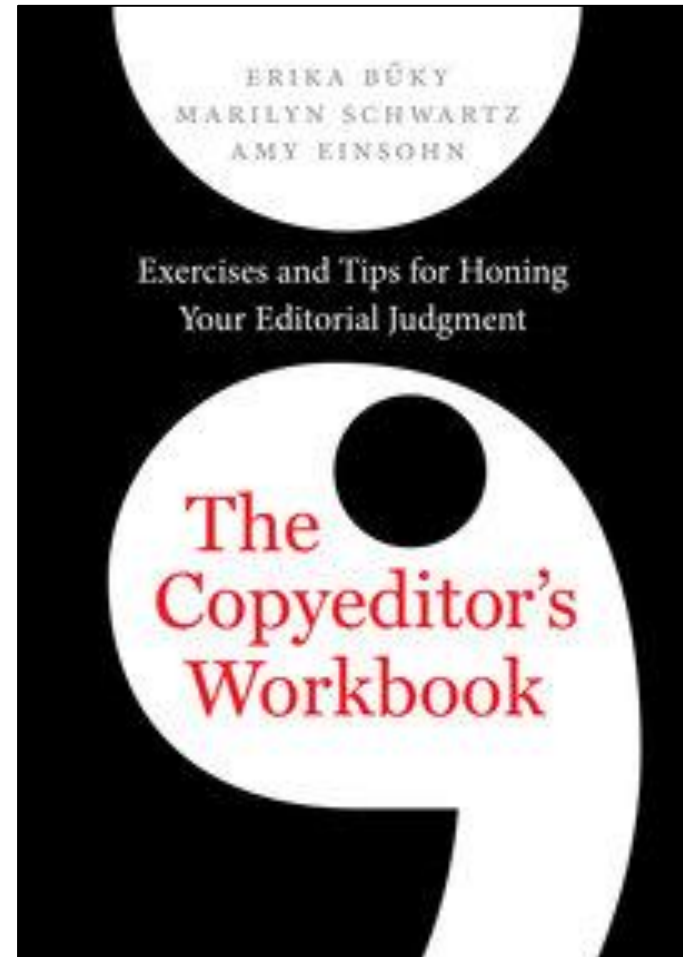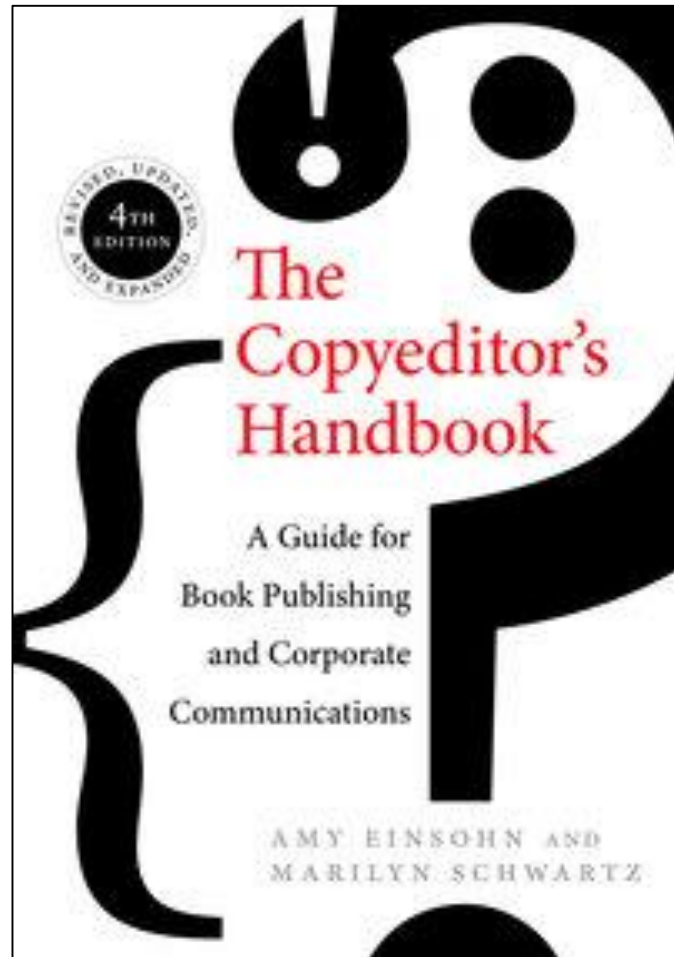
Reading Similar to This Talk
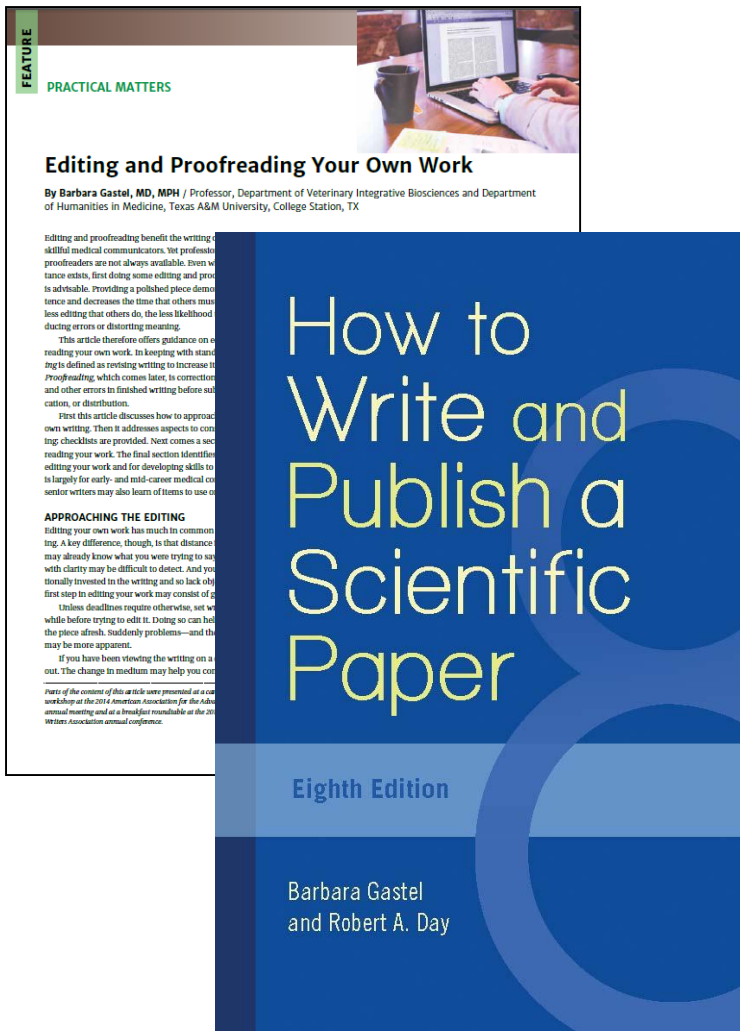
- "Editing and Proofreading Your Own Work" (*AMWA Journal,* 2015)

- Chapter 41: "How to Edit Your Own Work," in *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper,* 8th ed. (chapter new to this edition)

Questions and Answers

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Thank You!