Edit Sober:
79 tips for on-your-feet editing

Mark Allen
ACES 2018: Chicago
April 27, 2018
Look it up
Peek-a-boo
Peek-aboo
Peekaboo
Peekaboo
Never ignore that little voice
mnemonize

Definitions

from The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia

To associate (in memory) with a system of mnemonics; remember by means of mnemonics.
Wide fEEt
Quite a feat to eat
The correct spelling of **feet** has a shoe size in it.

If you were to win a Chicago-style hot-dog eating contest, that would be quite a **feat**.
Edit on your feet.
Palate vs Palette vs Pallet
TELephone charging on a manTEL
Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Hoggy Warty Hogwarts,
Teach us something please,
Whether we be old and bald
Or young with scabby knees,
Our heads could do with filling
With some interesting stuff,
For now they’re bare and full of air,
Dead flies and bits of fluff,
So teach us things worth knowing,
Bring back what we’ve forgot,
Just do your best, we’ll do the rest,
And learn until our brains all rot.

— Hogwarts School Song
Learn until our brains all rot.

– JK Rowling

Illustration by Hogwarts Horror, Deviant Art
Embrace your ignorance
Slow down

SLOTH ROAD TRIP

Are we there yet?

Just a few more hours to go, son.
Always reread the first and last paragraphs.
Think like a reader, not like an editor.
Step away: You’ll see different things when you come back
Change your viewpoint: bigger type, change the typestyle, print it out
If what you’re editing takes forever to get to a point, look at the conclusion.
Check the facts.
“If your mother says she loves you, check it out.”
Don’t take William Strunk and E.B. White too seriously. Advice is not edict.
Omit needless words.
Favor the active voice.
Keep the good words.
Don’t fear the passive voice.
Edit out loud.
Edit sober.
“Sometimes I write drunk and revise sober,” he had said, “and sometimes I write sober and revise drunk. But you have to have both elements in creation — the Apollonian and the Dionysian, or spontaneity and restraint, emotion and discipline.”

– Peter DeVries, “Reuben, Reuben”
Always check the quotations.
Give your eyes a rest.
Consider the pomodoro.
Be wary of absolutes (though I’d never say never say never).
Be a partner to your author.
You are superior, you don’t have to prove it.

I don’t mean to go all language nerd on you, but I just legit adverbed “legit,” verbed “adverb,” and adjectived “language nerd.”
Use online resources, but only the good ones.
Do I capitalize "German Shepherd" in a sentence?

For example, the sentence "We bought a German Shepherd puppy."
Would I capitalize German Shepherd, or just German?

★ Follow ★ 8 answers

Answers

🎉 Best Answer: Every word in a proper noun requires an upper-case initial. That applies to titles and place names and so on. Exceptions are sometimes made for common connectives such as "in", "of", "the" and "at" inside titles such as "The Catcher in the Rye" and "The Dukes of Hazard".

So your puppy requires *3* capitals, because the proper noun for its breed is German Shepherd Dog.

A German shepherd, on the other hand, is a person who tends sheep, and is either working in Germany or was born there. The word "shepherd" in that case is a common noun, but "German" remains a proper noun.

In "Dogue de Bordeaux", the "de" is French for "of", so need not have a capital letter.
"In GSDs" as of 1967

King Les The Lofty · 7 years ago
Keep a style sheet and use it for yourself as well as your author.
Follow your cohorts.
“When I'm trying to be most productive, I try to avoid that 15-minute hole we all get into where we're trying to figure out what's wrong with a sentence in a paragraph. I'll highlight in teal and move on. When I come back to it, I'm more likely to know what's wrong.”

– Aleksandra Sandstrom
Resist, but accept that language changes.
There are no rules.
Rules are made to serve communication, not vice versa.

– James Harbeck
Follow your style guide.
Don’t always follow your style guide.
“Rules and regulations such as these … cannot be endowed with the fixity of rock-ribbed law. They are meant for the average case, and must be applied with a certain degree of elasticity.”

—Manual of Style, preface to the first edition, 1906
“I have been often obliged to sacrifice uniformity to custom.”

– Samuel Johnson, Introduction to the Dictionary, 1755
Make peace with words.

– Karen Yin
Be conscious of othering language.
Once English accepts a word, treat it as an English word.
“When teaching me how to drive, my dad said that the moment I feel comfortable behind the wheel is when I’ll be most dangerous. I think about that when editing—never stop paying attention and questioning.”

– Tricia Callahan
There is no such thing as multitasking.
Read backward.
Eschew obfuscation.
Don’t sweat the Oxford comma.
If you are going to argue for the Oxford comma, at least use a real example:

“Among those interviewed [for a Merle Haggard documentary] were his two ex-wives, Kris Kristofferson and Robert Duvall.”
Limit exclamation points to exclamations.
Errors, like deer crossing the road, often travel in pairs.
Check for parallelism.
“Know your peak productivity times. If you have a deadline tomorrow, are you more effective at staying up late to finish or getting up early?”

– Melanie Padgett Powers
Favor hyphens for compound modifiers — they might not seem necessary, but they rarely confuse.
Think before cutting emphasis and intensifiers.
It is good to consider rephrasing to avoid expletives.
Consider rephrasing to avoid expletives.
All of this is Greece:

and dis is Crete
Avoid the use of qualifiers.

– EB White, Rule No. 8
Rather, very, little, pretty — these are the leeches that infest of the pond of prose, sucking the blood of words. … We should all try to do a little better, we should all be very watchful of this rule, for it is a rather important one and we are pretty sure to violate it now and then.

– EB White, Rule No. 8
Rather, very, little, pretty — these are the leeches that infest of the pond of prose, sucking the blood of words. … We should all try to do a little better, we should all be very watchful of this rule, for it is a rather important one and we are pretty sure to violate it now and then.

– EB White, Rule No. 8
Always check the math

I LOVE MATH...

IT MAKES PEOPLE CRY
Always check the math
Always check the math
You can’t have a multiple of a thing less than that thing and still have that thing.
"Amused" and "bemused" are not synonyms; "bemused" means confused. Or: A ≠ B, B = C, where A is amused, B is bemused and C is confused.
People have always used “bemused” incorrectly. 
\_\_((ツ)_/\
“Use programs to up efficiency and watch your back.”

– Heather Saunders
Don’t fear the semicolon.
If a thought is parenthetical, maybe it ought not to be in the paper; if it’s in the paper, maybe it ought not be parenthetical.
If a reader must double back to the beginning of a sentence because you've sent the reader down the wrong path, fix the sentence.

– Benjamin Dryer
As verbs, to "affect" is to influence, to "effect" is to bring about. "Effect" something and take the credit.
Don't stifle emphasis, but when “all” stands with “of,” one or both might be expendable: half of (all) the voters; all (of) my ducks.

Or “half the voters” and “my ducks.”
When figuring a percentage change, think chronologically.
Use an editing checklist.
It's “an” before a vowel sound. Sound is key. Silent h: “an honor.” Sounded h: “a historic.”
It’s aw, not awe when describing the cuteness of cats (as awe-inspiring as your cat may be).
Check all contractions, but double-check it’s and you’re — those are the easiest to mistype.
Work not for the person who signs your paycheck; work for the reader.

“What if, and I know this sounds kooky, we communicated with the employees.”
Put your card out, literally and figuratively. You never know where you’re going to make a connection, so never pass up an opportunity to tell people what you do.
“Be a good editor. The Universe needs more good editors, God knows.”

– Kurt Vonnegut
“Every time you edit well, you bolster the profession.”

– Rob Reinalda, ACES 2018, Chicago