

***Frequently Asked Questions About:
Student Use of Editors to Assist with Course, Thesis Proposal or Thesis Related
Assignments at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
Prepared by the Office of Academic Integrity***

WHAT IS AN EDITOR?

An editor is anyone who assists a student with the writing of any course, capstone, thesis proposal, or thesis-related assignment. An assignment includes a paper, lab report, take-home exam or quiz, or any other means of assessing a student's performance in a course or degree program.

WHO MAY BE AN EDITOR?

An editor may include a friend, family member, classmate, JHU employee, or a professional editor whether or not the editor receives any compensation in exchange for their work. If the person performs "editing" work, they are an editor.

WHAT COUNTS AS "EDITING"?

Editing includes both stylistic and substantive suggestions or modifications to your work. However, only stylistic modifications are generally permissible (see below).

Examples of editing, which depending on the the context may be either stylistic (permissible) or substantive (impermissible), include: 1) proofreading to identify typos; 2) grammar or spelling assistance; 3) assistance with sentence structure, word choice, or organization; 4) help identifying and using references; 5) condensing or shortening text; or 6) any other modification of your own writing by another person.

IS USING AN EDITOR TO EDIT YOUR COURSE, CAPSTONE, OR THESIS RELATED WORK PERMISSIBLE?

Yes, using an editor is permissible, unless the course instructor or degree program instructs you otherwise. In general, however, using an editor is only permissible if the editor provides stylistic and not substantive modifications to the course, capstone, or thesis related assignment.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STYLISTIC VERSUS SUBSTANTIVE MODIFICATIONS?

The line between stylistic and substantive modifications to your writing can sometimes be difficult to identify. This is why great care is needed if you choose to work with an editor.

Stylistic modifications would include:

- 1) correcting spelling, grammar, or punctuation;
- 2) moving existing sentences in your writing to other places in the document to enhance clarity;
- 3) help with footnote or endnote referencing style; or
- 4) suggesting an alternative word or phrase to substitute for an existing word or phrase in your document that has a similar meaning.

Substantive modifications would include:

- 1) writing a new sentence or paragraph that provides information that was not originally in your document;
- 2) rewriting a sentence or paragraph to include new information;
- 3) adding or deleting references; or
- 4) any other modification that changes the meaning of what you've written in a material way.

But this is not a comprehensive list.

IS USING AN EDITOR REQUIRED AT THE JOHNS HOPKINS BLOOMBERG SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH?

No. Unless your course instructor tells you otherwise, using an editor is not required for course related assignments. (This may not apply to masters or doctoral proposals or theses which may need to be of publishable quality -- please consult your advisor or the head of your degree program for questions about use of editors in proposal or thesis documents.)

As long as your writing in English is good enough to convey your meaning and provide the information required in the course assignment, an editor should not be necessary. If you are unsure if this is the case, or if you think your course instructor may consider writing style as part of the assignment grade, we suggest you discuss using an editor with the instructor (see below).

I'M STILL CONCERNED ABOUT MY WRITING AND WISH TO USE AN EDITOR. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

If you wish to use an editor, there are several steps we strongly recommend:

- 1) Be sure to emphasize to the editor that you are seeking stylistic and not substantive assistance with your writing. Share our explanation of the difference between these two with the editor.
- 2) We strongly recommend that you notify your course instructor or thesis advisor so that he or she will understand that you are using an editor, can offer any needed guidance, and will not be surprised if your writing style changes as a result.
- 3) If you have any doubt about whether an editorial modification to your writing is stylistic versus substantive it would be better not to use that modification or to ask the course instructor or degree program head for guidance.

4) Give yourself additional time to complete the assignment if you will be working with an editor. Last minute editorial assistance might be more likely to cross the line from style changes (permitted) to substantive changes (not permitted).

WHAT MAY HAPPEN IF I USE AN EDITOR INCORRECTLY AND TURN IN AN ASSIGNMENT THAT INCLUDES A SUBSTANTIVE PORTION WRITTEN BY THE EDITOR AND NOT BY ME? The Academic Ethics Code of the School of Public Health defines cheating as "using or attempting to use someone else's work or ideas in a context where you are expected to provide your own." (PPM Students 1- Academic Ethics). If you use an editor and submit an assignment that includes substantive modification provided by the editor, this may constitute an academic ethics violation. Ethics violations are punishable by a range of penalties including a grade of F in the course or assignment all the way up to expulsion from the University.

ARE THERE RESOURCES, OTHER THAN USING AN EDITOR, TO IMPROVE MY WRITING IN ENGLISH?

There is a 0-credit course, English for Academic Purposes (550.001), typically offered twice per year at the School: <http://www.jhsph.edu/courses/course/22520/2016/550.001.01/english-for-academic-purposes-i>. Please note that space in the course is limited.

In addition, software called Grammarly® (www.grammarly.com) offers free grammar checking assistance. A paid version of the software is also available. (Johns Hopkins does not endorse any specific software product).

Other resources include:

Bailey, S. (2014). *Academic Writing: a Handbook for International Students* Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. Print and electronic versions available in JHU library system

https://catalyst.library.jhu.edu/catalog/bib_5060983

Katz, M.J. 2009. *From Research to Manuscript : A Guide to Scientific Writing*. Dordrecht: Springer. Print and electronic versions available in JHU library system system

https://catalyst.library.jhu.edu/catalog/bib_5060983

Nygaard, L. (2015). *Writing for Scholars: A Practical Guide to Making Sense & Being Heard* (Second ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publishing.

Osmond, A. (2016). *Academic Writing and Grammar for Students* (Second ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publishing.