

# Tips for tight editing when time is tight

(spend time on what readers see the most)

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## It's called a lede for a reason

More than any other graph, a bad lede can kill a story. It's the most read part of your story, so give it the most attention.

Don't let a writer treat it as a suitcase in which he or she can cram as much as possible. Keep it brief. Keep it clear. If the lead captures the essence of the story in a few words, the reader will read on to learn the facts. A long lead shows a lack of confidence, as though the reporter doesn't believe the reader will read the whole story.

Multiple commas and dashes should be a red flag.

## Display type

**Headlines:** It's just a fact. An error in 80-point type will garner more attention than one in 9-point type. If there's no time to edit everything, always, always make sure you stop, breathe and check your headline for typos, inaccuracies and clarity.

Don't lose time trying to be overly clever or cute. Just be right and clear.

**Cutlines and graphics:** Same rules apply. People will notice errors in captions and graphics versus story content. The only thing that should take precedence over these is headlines.

## Last graph

The second most read block of type -- after the lede and display type -- is the last paragraph of a story. Make sure you leave them on a clean note.

## Decide what's most important

There can't be a universal list of what's most important in every story. Develop your own list of what's most critical. For example:

*What to edit if you've got 5 minutes:* Check lede, headline, captions and other display type for typos. Make sure names are all spelled the same. Make sure the dates are correct. Exception: If it's a crime story, libel check takes top priority.

*What to edit if you've got 10 minutes:* Check lede, headline, captions and other display type

for typos. Make sure names are all spelled the same. Make sure the dates are correct. Exception: If it's a crime story, libel check takes top priority. Check last graph for typos. Check all math.

With remaining time, read through story for major errors, but take note of garbled prose that you can return to fix if time is left over.

*What to edit if you've got 20 minutes:* Check lede, headline, captions and other display type for typos. Make sure names are all spelled the same. Make sure the dates are correct. Exception: If it's a crime story, libel check takes top priority. Check last graph for typos. Do a homonym check.

With remaining time, read through story for major errors, holes and garbled prose.

*What to edit if you've got 30 minutes:* Check lede, headline, captions and other display type for typos. Make sure names are all spelled the same. Make sure the dates are correct. Exception: If it's a crime story, libel check takes top priority. Check last graph for typos. Do a homonym check.

Read through story for major errors, holes and garbled prose, and make note of any inflammatory language.

With remaining time, clean up inflammatory language and check for bias.