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# GETTING IT ALL TOGETHER: EDITING A PAPER

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## Think, write, edit

Here is a first draft of a short piece about MTV. It's a mess.

Some people say that MTV is a real bad influnce on kids. There are a number of other things people complain about: The amount of violence on the music videos, cussing in other shows, and some sexual themes in the music videos. Beavis and Butthead in particular have caused quite a reaction. They have been blamed for causing young kids to set fires one of which was fatile. But MTV can't be considered all bad. It encourages kids to listen to music and gives them something to do besides hitting the streets. They also give advice about stuff like drugs and safe sex. If I was hired to change MTV, I'd make it less violent. I think that one thing would clean up most of its problems.

### Step 1: Check spelling.

There are two spelling errors in this piece. Did you catch them? They are *influnce* (that's *influence*) and *fatile* (that's *fatal*).

### Step 2: Check for punctuation mistakes.

There are four in this piece:  
*They have been blamed for causing young kids to set fires one of which was fatal.* There should be a comma after fires.

*Beavis and Butthead in particular have caused quite a reaction.* There should be commas before and after in particular.

*Beavis and Butthead* should be in italics or underlined since it is the name of a television series.

After the colon in the second sentence, *the* is capitalized. However, the phrase following the colon is not a complete sentence, so *the* should be in lowercase. Also, a colon should not follow a preposition (*about* is a preposition). Reword the sentence to say, "There are a number of other things people complain about, including the following: . . ."

### Step 3: Check for verb mistakes.

*Beavis and Butthead* is a television show (singular), not two individuals (plural). It should be *Beavis and Butthead*, *in particular has caused quite a reaction* (not *have caused quite a reaction*). *It has been blamed* (not *they have been blamed*)...

*If I was hired* should be *if I were hired*. This is a case where the subjunctive should be used. Since I have not actually been hired to clean up MTV, this is a "what if" (in other words, subjunctive) type of statement.

### Step 4: Check for adverb and adjective mistakes.

In the first sentence there is the phrase *real bad influence*. How bad? This question implies that an adverb is needed. Real is an adjective; really is an adverb.

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**Step 5: Check for unnecessary words.**

*In some sexual themes in the music videos*, who needs the word *some*? Obviously there are some - if there were none, would I be mentioning them at all?

**Step 6: Look for dumb statements.**

There's one very dumb one here. All writers make dumb mistakes on the first draft - and sometimes on the second draft. The mistake is this: *There are a number of other things people complain about*. What *other* things? I haven't said anything yet, so how can there be *other* things?

**Step 7: Look for colloquialisms, slang, informal phrases, and weak words.**

*Stuff like drugs and safe sex*: That should be changed to *issues such as drugs and safe sex*.

*Hitting the streets*: Change that to *spending time being bored or being tempted by trouble*.

*Clean up*: Change that to *solve*. *Cussing* should be *cursing*.

*MTV can't be considered all bad*: Change that, too. *MTV can't be considered completely bad. Perhaps it has some redeeming qualities*.

**Step 8: Check paragraphing.**

This is all one paragraph. Does it read well that way? No, so change that.



**After the first round of cleanup, this is what we have:**

Some people say that MW is a really bad influence on kids. There are a number of things people complain about, including the following: the amount of violence on the music videos, cursing in other shows, and sexual themes in the music videos. *Beavis and Butthead*, in particular, has caused quite a reaction. It has been blamed for causing young kids to set fires, one of which was fatal.

MTV can't be considered completely bad. Perhaps it has some redeeming qualities. It encourages kids to listen to music and gives them something to do besides spending time being bored or being tempted by trouble. They also give advice about issues such as drugs and safe sex.

If I were hired to change MTV, I'd make it less violent. I think that one thing would solve most of its problems.

It's better, but it's not good enough to suit me. Let's keep working on it.

**Step 9: Look for vague phrases.**

*Some people say that MTV is a really bad influence on kids*. Which people? Politicians, teachers, advertisers, parents, or kids themselves? The focus is the writer's choice. In this piece, focus on parents.

*I think that one thing would solve most of its problems*.

Why use words as vague as *thing* and *its*, especially in the punch line of the piece? Make it this: *I think that one change would solve most of the network's problems.*

**Step 10: Look for inconsistent phrases or sentences.**

*MTV can't be considered completely bad. Perhaps it has some redeeming qualities. It encourages kids to listen to music and gives them something to do besides spending time being bored or being tempted by trouble. They also give advice about issues such as drugs and safe sex.*

Check out the underlining: MTV, it, it, they. Why the switch to *they*? Change *they* to MTV. Since MTV is a singular noun, the verb must be singular as well. So write *gives*.

**Step 11: Look for repetition of words or phrases.**

*... the amount of violence on the music videos, cursing in other shows, and sexual themes in the music videos. If we're talking about two aspects of music videos, why not join them? Make it *the amount of violence and the sexual themes on music videos and the cursing in other shows*.*

*If I were hired to change MTV, I'd make it less violent. I think that one change would solve most of the network's problems. Two changes too close together. Not good. Which change do we want to change? I say let's go after the first one (although either is fine). What's another word? Check the thesaurus under *change*: overhaul, improve, rectify, correct. I like *overhaul*.*

*Beavis and Butthead, in particular, has caused quite a reaction. It has been blamed for causing young kids to set fires, one of which was fatal. Did you catch this one? It's subtle, but good writers catch the subtle goofs: *caused* in one sentence and *causing* in the next sentence. Change one of them. *Beavis and Butthead, in particular has caused quite a reaction. It has been blamed for inspiring young kids to set fires, one of which was fatal.**



**After the second round of cleanup, this is what we have:**

Some parents say that MW is a really bad influence on kids. There are a number of things parents complain about, including the following: the amount of violence and the sexual themes on music videos and the cursing in other shows. Beavis and Butthead, in particular, has caused quite a reaction. It has been blamed for inspiring young kids to set fires, one of which was fatal.

MTV can't be considered completely bad. Perhaps it has some redeeming qualities. It encourages kids to listen to music and gives them something to do besides spending time being bored or being tempted by trouble. MTV also gives advice about issues such as drugs and safe sex.

If I were hired to overhaul MW, I'd make it less violent. I think that one change would solve most of the network's problems.

This isn't bad. Would you stop here and turn it in? Not I - I'm just getting warmed up! Let's tear this piece apart word by word, looking for any weakling we can find.

*Some parents say - there's one. Say is weak; it can mean so many things: whimper, confess, scream, cry, whisper. What are the parents doing? They are certainly doing more than just saying. Are they shouting? Too intense for this piece. Are they suggesting? Too weak for this piece. How about arguing? I like it. (Argue here does not mean to fight with each other; it means "to strongly make a point.")*

*Some parents argue that MTV is a really bad influence. There's another one. Can't we do better than really bad? What are the parents saying - that MTV is nasty? That it's disgusting, it's warping our kids' minds, its music is turning our children away from John Denver? Ask a hundred people and you'd hear a hundred different opinions. What do these parents think is the bad influence? Try this: Some parents argue that MTV is a potentially dangerous influence. We are building up to discussing the violence on MTV, so let's hint at that in the beginning of the piece.*

I spotted another weakling: *quite a reaction*. What kind of reaction? A street riot of thousands of parents? Hundreds of angry letters to the editor of the local newspaper? A whiny phone call from one kid's aunt? What are we talking about here? Try this: *a public outcry from around the country*.

Here's another one: *it has been blamed*. When? Why? How did it happen? Try this: *As a result of Beavis's and Butthead's behavior in several episodes of the show, it has been blamed for inspiring young kids to set fires, one of which was fatal*.

Here is another weakling: *MTV can't be considered completely bad*. According to whom? Be more specific: *I don't believe MTV is completely bad*.

*Perhaps it has some redeeming qualities*. Why say *perhaps*? Either it does or it doesn't have redeeming qualities - who wants to read a wishy-washy piece? Change it: *To its credit, MTV has some redeeming qualities. For example..... MTV also gives advice about issues such as drugs and safe sex. Make this stronger: MTV also gives much-needed advice about issues such as drugs and safe sex-advice that kids may heed when they hear it from rock stars and other teen idols*.

*I'd make it less violent*. This sentence has no muscle. How about this: *I would clean up Beavis's and Butthead's attitudes, lessen the cursing on the network, and slash the violence - reducing it by at least 50 percent*. Now there's a little muscle!

*If I were hired to overhaul MTV, I would clean up Beavis's and Butthead's attitudes, lessen the cursing, and slash the violence - reducing it by at least 50 percent. I think that one change would solve most of the network's problems. We edited the next-to-last sentence to include three improvements, but the last*

sentence still refers to "that one change." More importantly, the conclusion fizzles; the final sentence is not as strong as the next-to-last sentence. This is the punch line of the piece, so we need to be clear, specific, and strong. How about this: *I believe that these few changes would help remove MTV from the field of potentially dangerous influences and make it a more healthy, creative, joyful entertainment for kids of all ages.* This sentence is much stronger, presents a clear opinion (it's not wishy-washy), ties the conclusion in with the introduction (the phrase about "potentially dangerous" links the two), and ends on a positive note rather than a depressing one.



**After the third round of cleanup, this is what we have:**

Some parents argue that MTV is a potentially dangerous influence on kids. There are a number of things parents complain about, including the following: the amount of violence and the sexual themes on music videos and the cursing in other shows. Beavis and Butthead, in particular, has caused a public outcry from around the country. As a result of Beavis's and Butthead's behaviour in several episodes of the show, it has been blamed for inspiring young kids to set fires, one of which was fatal.

I don't believe MTV is completely bad. To its credit, MTV has some redeeming qualities. For example, it encourages kids to listen to music and gives them something to do besides spending time being bored or being tempted by trouble. MTV also gives much-needed advice about issues such as drugs and safe sex - advice that kids may heed when they hear it from rock stars and other teen idols.

If I were hired to overhaul MTV, I would clean up Beavis's and Butthead's attitudes, lessen the cursing on the network, and slash the violence - reducing it by at least 50 percent. I believe that these few changes would help remove MTV from the field of potentially dangerous influences and make it a more healthy, creative, joyful entertainment for kids of all ages.

Finally, I'm happy with it . . .

**What is the difference between the way students write and the way professionals write?**

<b>average student</b>	write it, hand it in
<b>above-average student</b>	write it, edit it, rewrite it, hand it in
<b>exceptional student</b>	write it, edit it, rewrite it, edit it, rewrite it, hand it in
<b>professional writer</b>	write it, edit it, rewrite it, edit it, rewrite it, edit it, rewrite it, edit it, rewrite it, edit it, rewrite it, hand it in

**Good writing is 20 percent inspiration and 80 percent cleanup.**