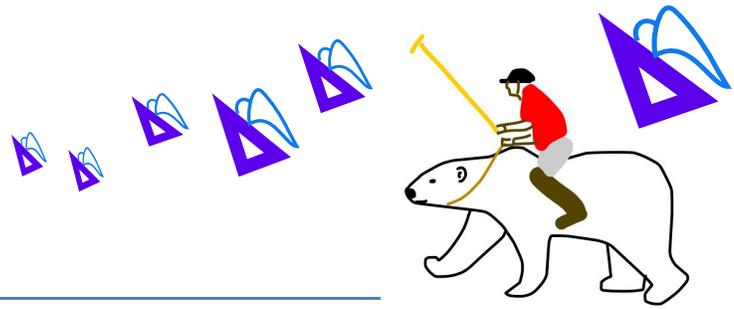


Checklists for Editing Visuals



What Is a Visual?

Any component that is not words alone is considered a visual: graphs, charts, illustrations, diagrams, and photos. Sometimes, even words alone become a visual — when they are subjected to artistic treatment and set apart from the narrative.

How Do Editors Edit Visuals?

For editors, we are not talking about manipulating an image using Photoshop or drawing software. We are talking about directing and refining the content of visuals.

At the manuscript development stage, editors are thinking about whether the graphics (or visuals) are worth the expense; whether they contribute enough value to the content; and where they can aid understanding and communication. There are no editing-industry standards for editing visual elements, and there are undoubtedly different sorts of concerns and different levels of sophistication when it comes to evaluating visuals. Designers and visual communicators would apply years of education and honed visual literacy to evaluate all sorts of elements of a visual.

The responsibilities of an editor can be broken up into the three distinct stages of content development: conception, copy editing, and quality control.

What Happens at Each Stage of Editing?

At the copyediting stage, the editor should be verifying that the content of the visuals matches the accompanying text. This is the most recognized editing skill set. Sometimes it is called line editing. This editor will apply the *Checklist for Style*.

At the page proofing stage, proofreaders should be checking that copyeditor's changes were correctly implemented and that all elements adhere to the style specifications of the product. This stage is sometimes called quality assurance and is done by someone on the design team, applying the *Checklist for Quality*.

The developmental editor, way back near the beginning of the project (or the acquisitions editor or managing editor, substantive editor or any number of other titles), acts as a sort of artistic director, deciding which visuals to commission, and directing their content. At this stage, they would apply the *Checklist for Substance*.

Below are checklists chunked according to the considerations relevant at each stage of product development. They are arranged in order of the publishing process.

Checklist for Substance

Apply this during development.

- illustrates what text says it will
- content matches what is indicated by running text and doesn't include (too many) extras
- contains enough detail (per narrative and goal)
- point of view appropriate to the content (e.g., cross section vs broad view)
- comparisons, contrasts, and context are appropriate to the data/ message
- style appropriate to audience and message (e.g., cartoon, set-up photo, or line plot graph)
- labels self-explanatory
- alignment and proximity of elements (and text) are relative to their importance and relationship to each other (e.g., heading levels)
- graphs start at zero and scale is not distorted
- data is represented accurately, avoiding pitfalls of distorted data representation
- requested resolution is adequate and appropriate to the medium (e.g., 300 dpi for print, 72 for on-screen)

Checklist for Style

This aligns most closely with the work of the copy editor.

- font type and size correct/ appropriate
- capitalization style correct
- word choice matches running text
- colours and patterns high enough contrast (consider usability and accessibility: screen size and resolution, colour blindness and other visual impairments)
- bright colours used for accents, not main content
- design choices fit theme/ ideologies
- design choices aid usability (consider audience and medium)
- numbers/ values match sources
- representations accurate and truthful
- totals and calculations verified (e.g., percentages add up to 100)
- single scale and measures used for related graphs (data)
- exaggerations are appropriate
- sets of visuals (of equal importance) are similarly sized
- look is consistent across product set/ brand

Checklist for Quality (Proofreading)

- spelling matches text
- caption matches image
- all elements of image present
- no details lost in the fold
- copy editor's changes input correctly
- alt text in place for accessibility and SEO
- text legible (size and contrast)
- resolution adequate and appropriate to the medium
- colours and contrast accessible
- credit/ source lines in place and accurate
- placement leaves enough space around text and doesn't force awkward layout
- visual infelicities edited out (e.g., a stain on a shirt, unless that's important)
- placement of captions and visuals is consistent
- captions are accurate — see additional captions [checklist](#)

Final Quality Check

Always review graphics in the final medium. That means printed on the press that will produce the final product, on a Kindle if that's the destination device, or on a SMARTboard, etc.

For a detailed description of everything an editor checks at each stage of product development, read the Editors Canada Professional Editorial Standards, available free at editors.ca.

The standard related to visuals states: C5. Recognize when graphic elements must be edited to clearly and effectively convey the intended meaning.