



ShaniRaja  
ELITE WRITING

# 9-STEP EDITING SYSTEM

By Shani Raja

Here is an editing technique I have created to help make your writing flow better.



## 1. Quick read

Start by giving the document you're editing a cursory readthrough. This gets you familiar with the subject matter, and also helps to discover the scope and boundaries of the piece. It's much easier to edit something once you know exactly what it's about.

## 2. Separate the points

This is a largely technical step. Basically, break the text up into separate points, one after another. It helps to physically separate each point from the previous one with a space. At this stage, you don't need to change the order or wording of any of the points—just separate them so you can begin evaluating them in isolation.



### 3. Make it make sense

Now, look more closely at each point to determine whether it makes complete sense to you. If something is unclear, seek clarification from the author and rewrite the point so it makes perfect sense—or make a reasoned assumption that you can later get the author to check. If you're unable to stand up a point after checking it, delete it. You don't want any point to remain in the narrative that won't make total sense to the reader.



## 4. Delete the nonessential

By this stage, the text is already much “cleaner” than when you started. Now, go through each point again—this time deleting anything you feel isn’t absolutely essential to the narrative. This stage tidies up the document so that you’re left only with unambiguously relevant and important points. You should also remove any baggage within a point that isn’t critical, or useful, to making it.

## 5. Make each point unique

Go through each point to make sure it isn’t repeated within the narrative. There is no excuse for making the same point more than once in a document—unless it’s done consciously to stress something at a useful moment. If you discover repetition, ruthlessly delete the duplicate point. If there is any part of a repeated point that is unique and worth keeping, simply turn it into a new point.

## 6. Create sections

By now, you should have a narrative composed of totally clear, essential, and unique points. You are in a much better place than at the start of the edit. Now it's time to begin arranging the points into an elegant narrative. Start by defining "sections" that arise naturally from the listed points. An easy way to do this is by tagging each point with a proposed section heading, and then giving the same title to other points falling within the same category. Don't worry if you find yourself changing section headings several times as your understanding of the material deepens. Keep going with the tagging of points until you're satisfied you've created several clear and meaningful categories throughout the document. The creation of sections starts to give definition to your narrative.



## 7. Make the sections flow

When you're done tagging all of the points with specific section headings, you're ready to begin making the different parts of your narrative flow well together. First, make a list of all the unique section headings that appear in your tags. Now, look at how those sections can best be ordered to create the most logical flow from one to another.

Notice that some sections are more closely related to each other than others; you may want to move those related sections nearer to each other on the list. The idea is to end up with a neatly ordered list of sections.

Numbering each section may help you discover the neatest possible arrangement.



## 8. Put the points into sections

Now that your sections are beautifully ordered, you are ready to move the points into their relevant categories. Physically move the points you previously tagged into their designated section, and then remove the tags. The process helps you tidy up the narrative—so that the points are no longer a random list of ideas, but are neatly placed into flowing categories. Take a moment to recognize how far you've come with the edit. You are now working with points that all make sense, are unique and essential, and are organised into well-defined narrative sections that move elegantly into one another.



## 9. Make it read well

You are able now to begin a more refined edit of the points within each section. Move the points around to create the most orderly and elegant arrangement of them within the section. Decide which point in each section to begin and end with, and how best to organize the rest of the points within the category. You're basically building elegance into the movement of points within sections—as you did with the sections themselves. Finally, tie the points together to read in the most powerful, compelling, rhythmic and evocative way possible.





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Feel free to share this 9-step editing system with friends and colleagues. To learn more about how to write with the style and flair of top journalists, check out my online writing courses, including the acclaimed **Writing With Flair: How To Become An Exceptional Writer.**

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