The Finishing Touches: Proofreading and Editing

Before the Editing Phase: Revision
Before you go through your paper with a fine-tooth comb, make sure that your essay is carefully organized, supported, and argued. Use the following techniques to ensure that your paper is ready for the final touches:

- Look at your prompt again
  - Make sure that you have met the assignment’s requirements: Double-check length, citation style, number of source, etc.

- Read your paper out loud
  - Read the paper slowly, making sure that you read each word on the page exactly
  - Ask a friend to read your paper to you
  - Read your paper backwards, beginning with the final sentence

- Bring out the red pen/the merciless editor inside (don’t be critical of yourself as you begin the writing process; wait to judge your writing once you have completed an initial draft)
  - Cross out paragraphs or sentences if they do not support your thesis/main idea; don’t be afraid to delete
  - Reorganize paragraphs, sentences, or sections so that there is a logical flow in your text

Most Important Editing Strategy: The Reverse Outline
Either on a separate sheet of paper or in the margins of your draft, write the focus/main idea of each paragraph. This activity gives you a lot of information, for instance

- If you have difficulty selecting one focus for the paragraph → you may have to split up the paragraph
- If you have multiple paragraphs with the same focus → you may need to delete one or more paragraph
- If there is no transition from one idea to the next → you will have to address this problem in revision

Develop a Checklist
To help focus your revision and editing, develop a checklist based on your prompt and your knowledge of disciplinary conventions in your study area. Dependent on the prompt, an appropriate checklist might be the following:
Answers the Prompt appropriately

Writing style exhibits clarity, concision, and specificity; author uses varied sentence structure and avoids redundancy

Diction (word choice) is excellent; author uses strong action verbs, appropriate (rather than flowery) word choice

There are no grammar, spelling, or mechanical errors

Effectively uses scholarly sources and correct citation

**Editing:**

*Once you have decided what is going to stay in your paper, ensure that there are no typos, or other errors that might distract from the content of your argument. Here are some common errors to watch out for:*

**Punctuation**

- Semi-colons and colons
  - Semi-colons are used to join two complete, related sentences.
  - Colons are used to set off a list after an independent clause.

- Comma splices or run-on sentences.
  - Incorrect: The class is very difficult, I am working hard to improve.
  - Correct: The class is very difficult. I am working hard to improve.
  - Or: The class is very difficult, but I am working hard to improve.
  - Or: The class is very difficult; however, I am working hard to improve.

- General Comma rules
  - Use commas before coordinating conjunctions that join sentences (but, and, so, yet, or, for, nor).
  - Use commas in a list or series.
  - Use a comma after a lead-in (In addition, However, etc.).
  - Use commas around parenthetical information (The beautiful view, which was slightly obscured by the trees, lifted our spirits.).

**Avoid vague pronouns** (pronouns for which the reference is unclear)

- It… must only be used when it is clear to the audience to what “it” refers:
  - Incorrect: It made her sick.
  - Correct: The chocolate cake was so rich that it made her sick.

- This… cannot be used to refer to an entire situation, it must be followed by a word that sums up the reference:
  - Vague: This makes a big difference.
  - Specific: This budget cut will make a big difference.