Susan E. Lindsey's List of Common Problems Editors Find in Manuscrdipts.
(See her website at https://savvy-comm.com/)

What the Editor Found

What are some of the common problems that editors find in manuscripts? What should you, as a writer, look for when you self-edit? Here are some problems found in manuscripts recently edited by Savvy Communication. (Style rules below are based on The Chicago Manual of Style (16th edition). Other style guides may handle punctuation, numbers, etc., differently.)

- Ellipses: Use three dots separated by spaces (like this . . .) rather than the automated ellipsis (like this…). Use four dots (three for the ellipsis, plus one for the period) to indicate a complete sentence excerpted from a larger piece. Never use more than four.
- Em dashes: Use an em dash to set off material within a sentence. An em dash (—) is longer than an en dash (–) or a hyphen (-). Don't put a space before or after dashes.
- Numerals vs. spelled-out numbers: As a general rule, Chicago style spells out numbers from zero through one hundred and uses numerals for numbers 101 and above. Some other style guides differ. Pick one method and be consistent.
- Overly long or convoluted sentences: Very long sentences (over about twenty-five words) slow the narrative pace and can be difficult to understand. Learn to love periods.
- Overuse of adverbs and adjectives: Use adverbs and adjectives sparingly. Instead, use strong verbs and specific nouns. Writers can often delete adverbs in dialogue attributions.
- Overuse of exclamation points: Prose is either exciting or it's not. Adding exclamation points will not make it exciting. Don't ever use multiple exclamation points.
- Paragraphs: Avoid overly long paragraphs, use a standard indent, and don't skip a line between paragraphs.
- Passive voice: Passive voice is object-verb-subject: "Johnson was convicted by the jury." Active voice is subject-verb-object: "The jury convicted Johnson." Active voice is shorter, stronger, and moves the reader along. Keep the subject in front of the verb.
- Quotation marks with other punctuation: Put commas and periods inside quotation marks; put colons and semicolons outside quotation marks.
- Serial commas: Chicago style uses a comma in a series of three ("red, white, and blue"). Some other styles do not ("red, white and blue"). Pick one method; be consistent.
- Spacing between sentences: Decades of typing teachers taught us to put two spaces between sentences. The current standard is for a single space between sentences.
- Spelling and grammar: Use spell-check and grammar check. They are not infallible, but they are useful. When in doubt about the spelling or exact meaning of a word, look it up.
- Quotation marks and apostrophes: Use curved apostrophes and quotation marks (" and ') rather than the straight ones.
- Use of weak verbs: Replace weak verbs with stronger, more specific verbs. In particular, search for and weed out various tenses of "make" and "do," and the "-ing" form of verbs.