

# You're Never Finished Until You ...

**Bonus  
Chapter**

## **In This Chapter**

- Show, don't tell
- Upgrade your vocabulary
- Utilize transition words
- Use prepositions correctly
- Avoid trite expressions
- Look out for confusing words

Proofreading (reading for errors) and editing (correcting errors) are a major step in completing your GED essay. Although your time will be limited for this effort, you must give yourself at least 5 to 8 minutes to give the essay the thorough going-over that it needs.

Some of the proofreading is easy. Is your handwriting clear? Are your erasures clean? Does your essay look as neatly presented as possible? (This assumes you will be writing your essay, which is currently the norm, not typing it on a computer.)

Other steps of proofreading are more involved. You need to look at your essay's basic structure and how well you have used transitions to make it flow and allow the reader to follow your logical thinking patterns. Have you avoided trite, overused expressions? You will also need to check that you have avoided all homonym mistakes, that your spelling is correct, and your vocabulary is appropriate to the occasion.

## **Check Your Essay**

Next to writing your essay, the most important thing is to carefully proofread what you have written and make any adjustments to the text. Cross out or erase any errors. However, because you have to write this essay in pencil, be sure that you have a good eraser with you on test day. This is usually *not* the eraser that comes at the end of a pencil—those erasers do an inadequate job of erasing and can smear your essay page. Buy a decent eraser for this test. A soft eraser similar to an artist's eraser works best.

The folks who read your essay response do not see your original test booklet. In fact, your essay is scanned and then sent out to the readers electronically. A smeared page due to an inadequate eraser will only look worse when it is scanned and then reproduced.



### GOOD IDEA

When you go to take your test, be sure you have your watch with you to help you schedule your writing time. Bring several sharpened No. 2 pencils with you, as well as a soft eraser.

If you find that you have left out a word or you need to add one, you can add words above a line using a caret (^) to indicate that additional information has been added. If you want to add a sentence or more, it is best to indicate that you have added more information at the end of your essay. You can do that by using a star or asterisk (\*) at the spot where the information belongs, and then use the same symbol at the end of your essay where you provide the additional information.

## Is It Structurally Sound?

Just as you wouldn't want a building that was not structurally sound, you don't want to write an essay that fails because the parts are wobbly. Look at your written essay when you have completed it, and ask yourself the following questions:

- Does it have a beginning, middle, and end?
- Does your first paragraph clearly introduce the main idea of your essay?
- Do your three inside paragraphs fully develop your main point?
- Does the final paragraph bring everything to a conclusion and provide a sense of closure?

If you run out of time or ideas, it's okay to write only two body paragraphs. Just be sure both of them are strong and well developed.

## Have You Used Transitions?

To improve your writing, you need to make sure that your ideas, both in sentences and paragraphs, stick together or have *coherence*, and that the gap between ideas is bridged smoothly. *Transitional* words and phrases will help do this. The more cues you give your reader about your reasons or your attitude toward your topic, the better. There are hundreds of transition terms, and you will find some of the more commonly used transitions in the following list. These are easy enough to add as you are proofreading and editing your work. Just write or print the appropriate transitions neatly above a caret (^) wherever you need to insert them.



### IN THE KNOW

The folks who read your essay use the transitions in your writing to follow the development and logic of your ideas, so be sure to provide a few of these transition guideposts for readers to follow.

You don't need to use many transition words in your essay. Just pick out a few from the following list and remember them while you write and when you proofread your essay. If you don't find any in your essay, insert them in appropriate places within your writing.

- **To show cause or additional information:** consequently, clearly, then, furthermore, additionally, in addition, moreover, because, similarly, besides that, in the same way, since

- **To change the line of reasoning (contrast):** however, on the other hand, but, yet, nevertheless, on the contrary, although
- **To open a paragraph or for beginning a new idea:** admittedly, assuredly, certainly, obviously, of course, true, unquestionably, in general, in this situation
- **For the final points of a paragraph or essay or signal a conclusion:** finally, lastly, therefore, in conclusion
- **To restate a point within a paragraph in another way or more precisely:** in other words, in fact, specifically, to illustrate
- **To indicate sequence or time:** after, during, as soon as, at first, at last, before, finally, in the meantime, later, meanwhile, next, soon, first ... second ... third

Let's take another look at the second paragraph of our original essay. You can see how the addition of a few well-placed transition words, shown here in bold, makes the paragraph sound more pulled together and professional:

**Another way** we can make the world a better place is for each of us to be more environmentally aware. **For instance**, the easiest thing we can do is to make sure our casual trash gets into the can—gum wrappers and take-out bags need to make it all the way into the trash can. **Also**, if we notice that someone else's trash missed the can, we should just pick it up and toss it where it belongs. **In addition**, it is very important that we not pollute our sewers by pouring used car oil down them or by allowing harmful pesticides to wash into them, **because** these harmful elements in the sewers eventually invade our lakes and streams, and this can affect our wildlife. **Finally**, we should be careful about wasting electricity around our homes. **Specifically**, an easy thing would be to replace our old electric light bulbs with the newer, more energy-efficient squiggly ones. These are just a few things that we can do to be more environmentally responsible.

## Does It Show Rather Than Tell?

When polishing your essay, it is usually not a big, smart-sounding word you are looking for. It is more often just a more precise word that will improve your essay.

A sentence might read, "The child ate his lunch." This is an okay sentence, but in your mind's eye do you *see* precisely what is happening as you read it? Probably not. Instead of dull and boring, give the reader a better picture of what you are saying. For instance, you could change it to "The toddler nibbled at his lunch." Now the reader can "see" the young child taking little bites and, most likely, being uncooperative about eating.

Let's look at a couple examples of how to make the reader "see" rather than just read the ideas from our earlier essay on improving the world.

After the brief discussion about separating regular garbage from recyclable trash, you might provide a personal comment such as "My city actually keeps track of who recycles, and then the city holds an informal competition among neighborhoods to see which neighborhood group recycles the most. This keeps folks motivated to separate their recyclable trash." With this added tidbit of information, the

reader can better “see” that this recycling effort is not only a personal goal, but that it can become a community endeavor.



#### GOOD IDEA

Try to “see” and “hear” what you’ve written like a GED reader will. Can you see the picture in your mind? Does it sound good to you? Try to hear what you’ve written in your head. Your essay isn’t just the words on paper, but the involvement of several of your senses.

In the third body paragraph, we wrote about individual efforts to offer our services as a personal effort to improve the world. In the third sentence, taking Grandma out is mentioned: “Even if it is just taking Grandma out or shoveling our sick neighbor’s walk in the winter, that would help.” A better option for this sentence might be “I could take my 85-year-old grandma to her weekly kidney dialysis sessions ....” Now you can “see” the situation better; this presents a much stronger picture. It also stresses more the need for us to reach out to those who can benefit from our services.

In the 45 minutes you have to think, plan, write, proofread, and edit your essay, you will not have a lot of time to spend “polishing.” But if you can improve a few plain sentences by including more specific images, that will benefit your essay.

## Vocabulary

Because a passing score on the GED will provide you with a high school graduation equivalency diploma, it is reasonable to expect that you have a vocabulary reflecting a certain level of knowledge.

The internet has a number of resources for learning vocabulary words. The College Board website ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)) has a program that will send you a new word to learn every day, and it can provide you with lists of vocabulary words that all high school graduates should know. Any of these sites can be helpful to you. In addition, the editors of American Heritage Dictionaries offer a book entitled *100 Words Every High School Graduate Should Know* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003). Every source is going to offer slightly different lists, but many of the words are the same among all the vocabulary word sources.



#### IN THE KNOW

If you are serious about improving your vocabulary, you will find that a study of Greek and Roman root words is very worthwhile. Those guys in togas knew what they were talking about.

No one is suggesting that you suddenly acquire the vocabulary of a Harvard graduate. In fact, when writers try to use a “big word” just to use a big word, the results are often awkward and sometimes even funny.

Notice how many of the words in the following list come from different subject areas that are covered in a high school curriculum:

**accentuate:** to bring out the best in

**alliteration:** repetition of the same sounds

**analogy:** comparison of two things that are not alike on the surface

**antibody:** a protein in blood or tissues that protects against certain germs

**antonym:** a word that is opposite of another word

**aspire:** to have a great ambition

**bamboozle:** to trick

**bizarre:** very strange or odd

**boisterous:** noisy, violent

**boycott:** to refuse to use or buy from

**camouflage:** a method of concealing or hiding

**chronology:** order or sequence of events

**circumnavigate:** to go around something

**commemorate:** to honor the memory of someone or something

**cower:** to crouch back in fear

**decorum:** proper behavior or conduct

**deciduous:** trees that lose their leaves every year

**deduction:** a subtraction from something, like on a paycheck, or a conclusion reached after considering all the information

**deign:** to be willing to do something that one considers beneath one's dignity

**despondent:** depressed, very unhappy

**dialogue:** conversation

**divulge:** to spread the word about something (like a secret)

**eclectic:** random, all over the place

**ellipse:** cone shape

**epiphany:** an awakening or an incredible insight about something

**embargo:** having to stay away from; not letting anyone else in or out, as in a shipping embargo to prevent trade

**erudite:** intelligent and knowledgeable

**enthusiastic:** showing great excitement or interest

**exponent:** mathematic symbol for multiplying a number by itself as many times the little number says (for example:  $3^2$ ,  $2^6$ ,  $6^4$ )

**exult:** to rejoice or to celebrate

**fallacy:** something that is proved to be untrue

**flourish:** to do well; to grow and develop

**formidable:** difficult to defeat; overwhelming

**gauche:** socially awkward, tasteless, and vulgar

**gargoyle:** a waterspout in the form of a grotesque human or animal figure projecting from a roof gutter to throw rainwater clear of a building

**guerrilla:** military force that is not a part of a regular army and operates in small bands

**guru:** someone who is very talented at or knowledgeable about one thing

**heritage:** tradition; something passed down

**hieroglyphic:** picture writing

**hologram:** 3-D image

**hypocrisy:** to say one thing and do another

**immune:** protected from getting a disease

**impertinent:** rude

**inference:** making a guess, hypothesis

**introspection:** quiet thinking

**jaunty:** stylish

**jovial:** jolly, tending to laughter

**kilometer:** 1,000 meters (3,281 feet or .6 miles)

**labyrinth:** maze or puzzle

**laconic:** using concise or short answers

**lichen:** fungi

**light-year:** speed of sound light travel

**maneuver:** move around

**marsupial:** mammal with a pouch

**metaphor:** a comparison without using *like* or *as*

**monologue:** a speech with only one person talking

**mosaic:** small pieces put together to make a picture

**mutation:** change of some sort; in biology, it's a change in gene or chromosome

**nebula:** cloud of gas or dust

**nocturnal:** someone or something that sleeps during the day and is active at night

**notarize:** to certify or attest to a signature as being valid or authentic

**nuisance:** someone or something that is annoying

**obfuscate:** to talk around an issue in a confusing manner rather than being clear and obvious

**omnivore:** organism that eats plants and animals

**outrageous:** exceeding all bounds of what is right

**ozone:** poisonous gas layer

**plagiarize:** passing off another person's work as one's own

**parasite:** organism that gets its nourishment from another

**plateau:** an elevated piece of land

**polygon:** a flat, closed shape with three or more sides

**protagonist:** main character in a play

**pulverize:** to pound, crush, or grind

**quandary:** condition of uncertainty or doubt

**quarantine:** isolation for an amount of time for an animal or person

**quota:** amount of something assigned

**rain forest:** an area of evergreen trees marked by regular rainfall

**random:** having no pattern

**recede:** to draw back from

**renaissance:** any sort of rebirth of a former style, such as in music, art, or language

**renegade:** outlaw

**repose:** peace, relaxation, calm

**respiration:** process of supplying oxygen to cells by breathing

**sacrifice:** give

**silhouette:** outline of a body or body part

**solstice:** the time of year when the earth is closest (June) or farthest (December) from the sun

**spectrum:** a range of something or another, such as spectrum of colors (as in a rainbow)

**stereotype:** a conventional or oversimplified idea or image

**strategy:** plan

**suffrage:** the right to vote

**symbiosis:** two things that live off each other

**synonym:** a word that means the same as another word

**tariff:** a tax or duty imposed by the government

**technique:** method, way of doing something

**tempo:** beat of music

**totalitarian:** opposite of democracy, centralized and dictatorial form of government

**toxin:** poison

**tranquil:** peaceful, quiet, restful

**tumultuous:** noisy and loud, opposite of tranquility

**tundra:** cold area

**ultraviolet:** harmful rays from sun

**unanimous:** everybody agrees

**undulate:** an up-and-down movement, as in waves

**vaccine:** an injection that offers disease protection

**vacillate:** to change one's mind

**vehement:** fervent, passionate, intense

**vertebrate:** having a backbone

**virtuoso:** an expert or genius, an exceptional performer in music; one who has a natural talent and can learn just by listening

**vortex:** a whirling mass or overwhelming power

**wretched:** extremely unhappy

**yacht:** a large, expensive boat

**zoology:** study of animals



#### HEADS UP!

When you use big vocabulary words just to sound erudite, you might end up obfuscating what you are trying to say.

## Grammar Check

The following sections provide abbreviated grammar checklists to help you as you proofread and edit your essay. Be sure to correct any grammar errors that have sneaked into your essay.

- Subject-verb agreement:** Singular subject takes the singular verb form; plural subject takes the plural verb form. The *child stands/children stand* at attention.
- Subject-object pronouns:** Subject pronouns can perform action within a sentence, while object pronouns are receivers of an action. *I, you, he, she,* and *it* are subject pronouns; *me, you, him, her,* and *they* are object pronouns. *She and I* (subject) are taking *them* (object) to the mall.
- Pronoun agreement:** Singular pronouns match with singulars; plurals with plurals. Remember that some pronouns sound plural—everybody, everyone, nobody, somebody—but they are really singular. *Everyone* takes out *his* or *her* homework from last night (not *your homework*).
- Adjectives vs. adverbs:** Adjectives modify (describe) nouns; adverbs modify mostly verbs, but also adjectives and even other adverbs. The *extremely* (adverb) *humid* (adjective) night air *suddenly* (adverb) erupted into a *noisy* (adjective) thunderstorm.



## Usage Check

Our English language is often confusing, even for those of us who have been speaking it all our lives. Here are a few English usage rules that need to be followed when you write and review your essay:

- ❑ **Avoid double negatives.** Some words like *barely*, *scarcely*, and *hardly* are already negative; so don't use another negative with them. For example, *I hardly have none* shows incorrect usage. *Barely any*, *scarcely any*, or *hardly any* shows correct usage.
- ❑ **Avoid sexist references.** Rather than *waiter* or *waitress*, use *server*; instead of *steward* or *stewardess*, use *flight attendant*. The use of *he/she* is preferred if a singular pronoun is needed and you mean both.

## Sentence Structure Check

- ❑ Sentences need a subject and a verb and a complete thought. This is called an *independent clause*.
- ❑ Two sentences (independent clauses) can be joined together with a semicolon, or a comma and one of these independent conjunctions: *but*, *or*, *yet*, *for*, *and*, *nor*, *so*.
- ❑ Besides independent clauses (subject and verb forming a complete thought), we have *dependent clauses* that usually have a subject and verb with an incomplete thought.
- ❑ Independent clauses and dependent clauses can be joined together, usually by dependent conjunctions such as *because*, *after*, *as*, *before*, *when*, *whenever*, *while*, *where*, *wherever*, *who*, *whoever*, *although*, *though*, *since*, *which*, or *that*.

## Punctuation Check

- ❑ All sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a period.
- ❑ Two independent clauses are joined by a comma and an independent conjunction or by a semicolon.
- ❑ When combining a dependent and independent clause, if the dependent clause comes first, it is followed by a comma; if it comes second, no comma is needed.

## Using Verb-Preposition Combinations Correctly

Sometimes we use verb-preposition combinations incorrectly when we slip into local, regional, or informal speech patterns. Although this seems like a complicated issue, it is not. The following list will refresh your use of the correct combination of words:

- You *agree on* a thing; you *agree with* a person
- You are *angry about* or *at* a thing; you are *angry with* a person
- You *argue about* a thing; you *argue with* a person
- You are *concerned with* a problem; you are *concerned for* a person

- You *escape from* a bad situation; you *escape to* another place
- You *wait for* a thing or person; you *wait on* a customer; you *wait with* someone else



#### IN THE KNOW

It is not unusual for people to use informal language around friends and family. Also, certain areas of our cities and various regions of our country sometimes have unusual ways of using language. However, the GED uses EAE, or Edited American English, which is the kind of English a school textbook would use.

## Avoid Trite Expressions

Certain expressions in English are overused. We call such expressions *trite*. This means that they are stale and common, and worn out. Avoid these expressions. If you have never heard any of these before, then good for you—don't use them now. If you find any trite expressions while you are proofreading your essay, remove them and say something in your own words. Readers find them boring and they won't help your essay.

This list is just a sampling of boring, trite expressions that are overused today. You can find more examples of trite expressions on the internet. Change these overused expressions if you find them in your essays. For example, change *at this point in time* to *at this time* or *now*.

- At that/this point in time
- In today's world, in the world today
- From the beginning of time, since the beginning of time
- Better late than never
- Due to the fact that
- At the present time
- On the other hand
- Last but not least
- Words cannot express
- Pushing the envelope
- Contrary to popular opinion, according to popular opinion
- Few and far between
- Easier said than done
- When all is said and done
- Over and above
- Better than ever
- At this time and place

## Words That Are Easily Confused

Some words are easily mixed up. *Homonyms*, for instance, are words that sound alike but mean different things (*see* and *sea*, for example). Although these confusing words may seem obvious while you are looking at them in this book, they can be easy to mix up when you are composing an essay quickly. Therefore, it's important to be on the lookout for them when you proofread your essay.



### IN THE KNOW

If you listen closely, even professional news reporters and politicians fall victim to these confusing word demons. Don't let them hide in your essay.

Check out this list of some common confusing words:

**All together/altogether:** *All* is a pronoun and *together* is an adjective or adverb. Therefore, during holidays families are *all together* for an *altogether* good time.

**Accept/except:** *Accept* is a verb meaning to agree; *except* is a preposition that suggests exclusion or rejection. All the guests had *accepted* the dinner invitation *except* Duane.

**A lot/allot:** *A lot* (two words; *alot* is not a word) refers to many, while *allot* (one word) refers to putting something aside. Because many people do not *allot* much of their income into savings, they do not have *a lot* to fall back on when times get tough.

**Among/between:** *Between* implies two; *among* implies more than two. *Among* all the brothers and sisters, Jada was the one who settled disagreements *between* their mom and stepdad.

**Amount/number of:** An *amount* refers to a mass of something; *number of* refers to the number of somethings. Before you can form a *number of* snowballs, you have to have a certain *amount of* snow.

**Affect/effect:** *Affect* (verb) means to act upon something else; *effect* (noun) is a result. The *effects* of a long time with no sunshine often *affects* people's spirits. (Less commonly, *effect* can also be used as a verb, meaning "to bring about": The hot and muggy weather *effected* severe thunderstorms.)

**Because:** Don't use *because* when you should be using the word *that*. The reason I was late this morning *is because* I overslept ... should be: the reason I was late this morning *is that* I overslept.

**Coarse/course:** *Coarse* refers to something that is rough, as in *coarse* sandpaper, and *course* refers to a subject or a path one follows. Miguel's *course* in life was a *coarse* one: he suffered many setbacks before he made his fortune.

**Disinterested/uninterested:** *Disinterested* refers to a neutral state of mind; *uninterested* means you don't care. Marcel was glad he had a *disinterested* government teacher who would listen to both sides of an argument rather than an *uninterested* one who didn't care what anyone said.

**Fewer/less:** *Fewer* you can count; *less* you have to measure. When choosing foods that are good for you, look for those with *fewer* calories and *less* fat.

**Irregardless:** There is no such word. *Regardless* of the fact people do use the word, *irregardless* is not a word.

**Its/it's:** *Its* shows possession; *it's* is a contraction for *it is*. *It's* funny to watch my dog trying to catch *its* own tail.

**Loose/lose:** *Loose* means roomy, plenty of slack; *lose* means to fail to win or to misplace. Granmama always *loses* her false teeth because they are too *loose*.

**Personnel/personal:** *Personnel* refers to a group of people, while *personal* means belonging to an individual. *Personnel* offices are now referred to as HR or Human Resources to give the department a more *personal* touch.

**Quiet/quite/quit:** *Quiet* means calm, serene, or silent, while *quite* is an adverb meaning very or a lot. The *quiet* of a school at night is *quite* a contrast to its daytime clamor. *Quit* means to free oneself from something, to leave or depart from. She *quit* the school play.

**There/their/they're:** *There* is an adverb referring to place or position; *their* is a possessive adjective; *they're* is a contraction for the words *they are*. *They're* convinced that it is *their* destiny to move *there* before they die.

**Thorough/through/threw:** *Thorough* means complete or careful; *through* is a verb indicating direction; *threw* is a verb form of *to throw*. The pitcher *threw* the ball directly *through* the strike zone, which *thoroughly* surprised the batter.

**To/too/two:** *To* is a preposition showing direction or the word preceding a verb; *too* is an adverb meaning also; *two* is the number following one. The *two* young goblins were *too* excited *to* say "Trick or treat!"

**Whose/who's:** *Who's* is a contraction of the two words *who is*, while *whose* is a possessive pronoun showing ownership. *Whose* turn is it to see *who's* ringing the doorbell?

**Your/you're:** *Your* is a possessive pronoun showing ownership, and *you're* is a contraction of the words *you are*. *You're* very quick to show off *your* new car.



#### HEADS UP!

If you are fortunate enough to write your essay on a computer, realize that spell check does not recognize these look/alike, sound/alike words as long as they are spelled correctly. Ewe can sea how its a miss take too relay on it to much!