# Proofreading your work: Lengthy phrasing and long sentences

Proofreading is difficult because we tend to read what we *think we* have written. Effective proofreading strategies help you get enough distance from your writing to identify and correct errors more easily. This handout guides you through two different methods for identifying, diagnosing, and resolving issues with sentences that are too long, or incomplete. One is auditory, and one is visual. Read through and decide which will be more useful for you, then try it!

## Method 1: Auditory strategy for proofreading your sentences

Listening to a section of your text being read aloud by someone else, including text-to-voice software, can help you more easily identify where your writing becomes lengthy, repetitive, or wanders off point. Or, where a sentence stops short.

1. Use the ''Read Aloud'' function in MS Word, or ''Windows Narrator'' for other word processors.

2. Have a printed copy in your hand or a copy open in another window.

3. When you hear that something is repetitive or lengthy, highlight the section.

4. Don't try to fix your text as you are listening. Instead, take a three-step approach to editing.

   A. **Identify** what needs fixing by highlighting problem areas.
   B. **Diagnose** the problem by figuring out why it wasn't easy to listen to:
      i. Are words or ideas repeated? Are you going off point?
      ii. Listen again if necessary
   C. **Resolve** the issue by editing the text:
      i. Cut repetition and perhaps restructure the sentence or paragraph

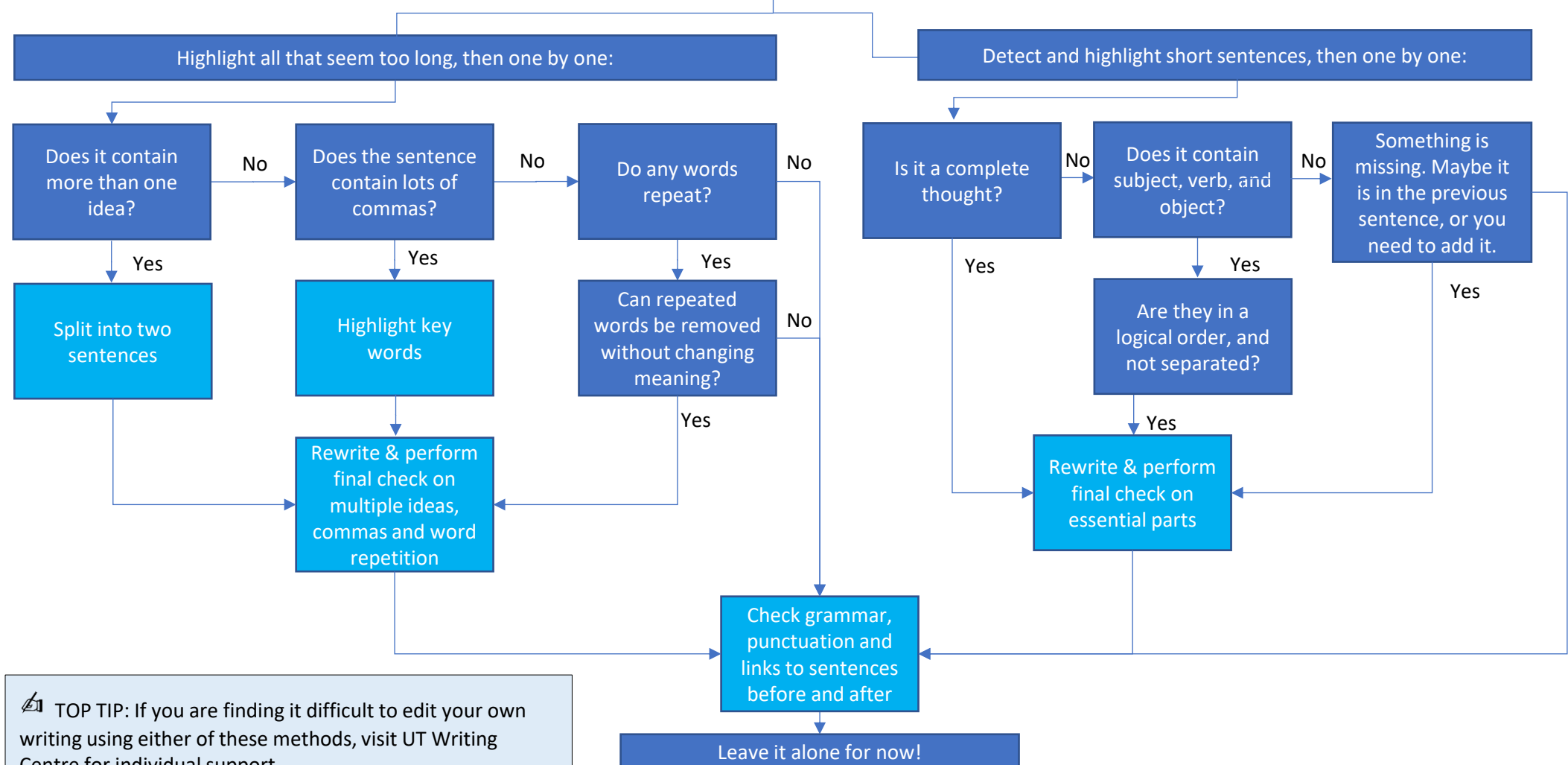> ✍ TOP TIP: For either method, keep a ''cuts'' document alongside each draft version of your text. Paste any material you cut from your working document in here to make deleting text easier. When nearing the end of a draft, you can browse your cuts document for anything that should go back into a draft. (Usually, nothing ever goes back in).

# Method 2: Visual strategy for proofreading your sentences

A visual method for identifying long sentences can give us the distance we need to analyse our own writing.

**Highlight every full stop (Ctrl + F). Now you can see how long your sentences are without even reading!**

**Identify your typical sentence length. They do not all need to be the same, but if you identify your average, it is easier to spot long ones.**

**Highlight all that seem too long, then one by one:**

**Detect and highlight short sentences, then one by one:**

Does it contain more than one idea? — No → Does the sentence contain lots of commas? — No → Do any words repeat? — No →

Is it a complete thought? — No → Does it contain subject, verb, and object? — No → Something is missing. Maybe it is in the previous sentence, or you need to add it.

Does it contain more than one idea? — Yes ↓ Split into two sentences

Does the sentence contain lots of commas? — Yes ↓ Highlight key words

Do any words repeat? — Yes ↓ Can repeated words be removed without changing meaning? — No

Is it a complete thought? — Yes

Does it contain subject, verb, and object? — Yes ↓ Are they in a logical order, and not separated?

Something is missing... — Yes

Can repeated words be removed without changing meaning? — Yes

**Rewrite & perform final check on multiple ideas, commas and word repetition**

Are they in a logical order, and not separated? — Yes ↓ **Rewrite & perform final check on essential parts**

**Check grammar, punctuation and links to sentences before and after**

**Leave it alone for now!**

✍ TOP TIP: If you are finding it difficult to edit your own writing using either of these methods, visit UT Writing Centre for individual support.