

Blue Pencil Editing

A resource for editors - and those who need one.

Product Review: The "Perfect" Editing Software

In this technological day and age, most professions are benefiting from software developments that help people do their jobs. Not so much for editors ... Our biggest advancement in recent years has been moving from paper to screen. True, there's spell check, but its usefulness is debatable (e.g., it won't catch "there" for "their"). I am, however, a big fan of Microsoft Word's track changes feature, which I almost always use when editing.

So I was very curious when, in response to a blog post I wrote about how to spell "copy editor," I received an offer from *Intelligent Editing* to try PerfectIt, their software designed to find and correct inconsistencies in abbreviations, capitalization, hyphenation, and spelling. It also checks punctuation in lists, bullets, and tables as well as the numbering of tables and figures. Furthermore, you can customize the program for a specific style guide, or the company will do it for you for an additional fee.

PerfectIt works within Word, as a complement to the spelling and grammar check. The software quickly runs a series of tests to bring discrepancies to your attention, and "users make the final decision about suggested changes." You can review each occurrence of a particular error or correct all the instances at once. It also accepts tracked changes and removes comment boxes! To get a feel for the way the program operates, *watch the demo*. The software is easy to use, and I appreciate the focus on consistency, which is my primary concern when editing. (Pick a rule and stick with it!) PerfectIt searches for mistakes spell check doesn't, such as whether numbers are spelled out or given as numerals. I like that you can adapt the program to a certain style, although, like many editors, I work with several style guides. PerfectIt isn't as comprehensive as a style guide, just as spell check isn't as comprehensive as a dictionary, but it's a good starting point.

Of course, using a software program is not the same as having an actual editor read your work. It can't look for character development or understand all the intricacies of grammar and language—at least not yet. Their site even says, "proofreading requires a human touch." So, as with spell check, you can't rely on PerfectIt alone—you'll still need to read through your document at least once. It's more like an assistant.

In these penny-pinching times, not everyone can afford a professional editor, and most people don't have the time, ability, or desire to edit themselves. PerfectIt provides an alternative, but if you "attempt to edit on your own," you'll need a basic understanding of the style guidelines you're following to decide how you want the program to handle inconsistencies. PerfectIt "works *with* you as you check through text," not *for* you. Fortunately, the company's Web site gives advice about writing a style guide and setting up PerfectIt accordingly.

For editors, it could make your job a little easier—if it doesn't put you out of one! You can *download PerfectIt* and try it free for fourteen days.

Lauren Holder Raab
Writer/Editor