I miss my red pen. My blue one, too.

Back in the day, when my mother taught secondary school English, one of my duties when I went home for university holidays was to go through piles of papers and mark all the spelling and grammar mistakes I could find. Because my mother was a stickler for grammar and spelling, and the other English teachers were not, I often made a student paper bleed red with strokes from my pen. I could not let a single spelling mistake or grammar faux-pas slip by. It became a point of pride. (And there is where my grammar-Nazi-ism began.)

I think it’s safe to say that I’ve done a fair bit of editing. I have not edited very much 2017-style, though. The two processes feel very different because “2017-style” entails editing and writing for collaboration and not correction. During the writing and editing of this assignment, I eschewed the technology I knew well and put my first draft on Microsoft Word rather than on a piece of paper in my own handwriting, I have to admit that writing and editing on a computer screen is not nearly as gratifying as writing and editing on paper. I miss the tactile sensation of putting pen to paper.

The experience also has proven to me that errors in spelling, grammar, and syntax escape me more easily when I use a keyboard rather than pen and paper, Especially during the writing of the definitions, I found completing a sentence difficult without re-jigging it in my head. Most annoyingly, I would sometimes fix the sentence before it was actually on screen -- which meant that from time to time my original thought got lost. At least when it was on paper, I had a record of my thought process that didn’t get destroyed by a few backspace-key strokes.

I had a similar experience when proof-reading and editing online. I’d read, correct and then re-read – only to find that I’d missed something that I would normally catch. After three tries, I broke down and printed a copy. The editing process went much smoother when I used technology I fully understood.

I was reminded of the importance of proper syntax and grammar, the frustration of looking to say what I mean and mean what I say, and the feeling of satisfaction when I place just the right word in just the right context in just the right position in a sentence.

While writing the application letters and going through the team selection process, I came to appreciate the importance of a good application package. Deciding whether to hire or pass on a candidate based solely on the strength of a letter and a page or two of advertising is daunting, and choosing the exact words to convey an image that resonates with the reader is vital to persuading the reader to do what the writer wants.

Editing and proofreading the definitions was an interesting experience for me. What I found most difficult was making suggestions without totally rewriting the paragraph and consequently taking the writer’s voice away from the product.

On a side note, at the risk of further sounding like a grumpy old man, the speed of requests and responses is blowing my mind a little bit. It feels like a big request to expect a thoughtful and insightful critique at my home from someone within forty-eight hours from the time I send it to them from my home. In my mind, it takes a day just to organize a place to meet and exchange information, unless the situation is unbelievably dire!

The speed at which documents can travel these days seems to bring with it the expectation that replies should be coming faster and faster. A balance must be struck between the speed and the quality of the reply. I have found that giving a bit of time between writing a document and editing and sending it to be very useful. The break between writing and editing gives me a bit of perspective and allows me to find better words and phrases to clarify points I am trying to make. (However… missing a deadline to give myself that perspective, no matter how inadvertent, is disrespectful and unacceptable. I truly believe this, and I apologise profusely and sincerely to the poor person whom I made wait for feedback.)