

Editing checklist: How to make your case study sparkle

After I write a case study, I go over it with a fine tooth comb and tighten it up so there are no holes, everything fits where it should, and it reads like a great story.

- **Does the story start with a challenge, and end in a victory?**
There may be some twists and turns along the way, but the “20,000-foot view” should stay the same.
- **Is everything in a logical order?** If not, readers will get confused, and the story won’t be a hit.
- **Is everything relevant?** Think of your case study as a train track -- it starts with the hero’s initial challenge and ends with their eventual victory. It’s OK to have some “stops” along the way (e.g. a false victory that turns out to be a setback, an additional challenge gets piled on in the middle of the story, etc), but readers won’t tolerate detours or irrelevant details (e.g. the hero likes donuts).
- **Are there enough subheads?** There is no perfect number, but as a general rule, if any of your sections look too long (usually over 8 short paragraphs) you may need to add more to break up the text and keep the story moving. Too many subheads can clutter the page, so be careful.

- **Do the quotes sound polished?** You can slightly edit and modify your subject's quotes to make them sound more polished. They don't need to be perfect, and you should never change the *meaning* of their quote, but you can remove redundancies, chop off excess words, and replace boring words with more exciting alternatives. (Remember to keep the Hero's ideas intact -- you're just changing the wording, not putting words in their mouth. Also, make sure to let the client know whenever you edit the subject's quotes, so he/she can get approval from the subject before publishing.)
- **Can you bring out more excitement/drama?** Case studies don't need to read like Hollywood action movies, but there's a lot you can do to spice things up quickly and without much effort. Here are a few ideas:
 - Replace dull words/phrases with *visual* words.
 - Add "internal cliffhangers". This is when you end off one section with an "open loop" that you'll resolve in the next section.
 - Use contrast make your narration more powerful. (Example: "Marian started to worry about getting pigeonholed into a single narrow industry" → "After working in marketing and tech for years, Marian started to worry about getting pigeonholed into a single narrow industry.")