

## PerfectIt—the editor’s friend

In my previous article on electronic editing, I mentioned that the ‘Copy editors and proofreaders’ group on LinkedIn had provided me with some valuable tools for speeding up electronic editing. In this article I focus on one of those tools—*PerfectIt*— the software package that I’ve found to be most useful and user-friendly.

### Features of the program

Marketed by a company called [Intelligent Editing](http://www.intelligentediting.com/default.aspx) (<http://www.intelligentediting.com/default.aspx>), *PerfectIt* is designed to pick up inconsistencies in a document. The blurb on the website explains that it checks for:

- consistent hyphenation and capitalisation
- list/bullet capitalisation and punctuation
- common typos
- abbreviation definitions
- capitalisation of headings
- consistent labelling of tables and figures.

*PerfectIt* can do other editing tasks; for example, it can generate a table of abbreviations, find and remove comments accidentally left in a document, accept track changes, update cross references and remove any double spaces. The program can also be modified for a particular house style.

By now you’re probably wondering what this leaves for the editor to do! In reality, copyediting is still best done manually, as I’ll explain below. But first, here is an example of how the program functions.

### Example

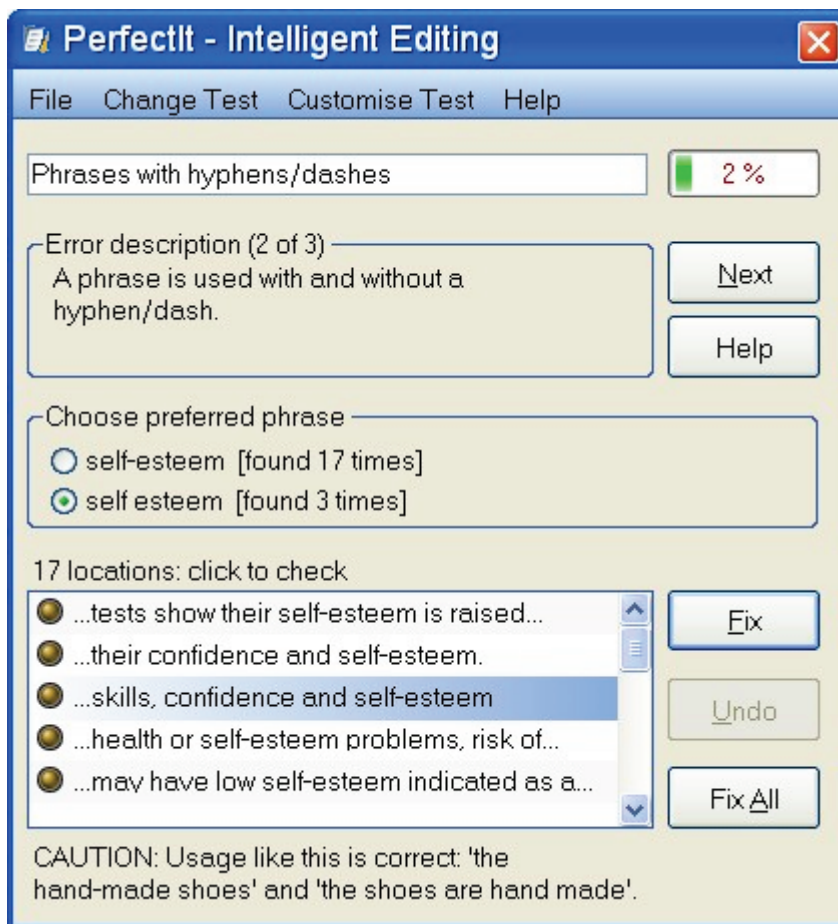
Imagine that a document contains both ‘self-esteem’ and ‘self esteem’. It may be that both are correct (as in ‘self-esteem issues’ and ‘high self esteem’). Even so, the hyphenation may not always be applied correctly.

To check this, the editor opens *PerfectIt*, and a small dialogue box appears at the bottom of the screen. Clicking on ‘Start’ in this box causes the program to scan the document for problems (this generally takes a couple of minutes), and one of the things it picks up is the hyphenation inconsistency in ‘self esteem’. As shown in the screen shot, the dialogue box provides a description of the error—‘A phrase is used with and without a hyphen/dash’—making it quite clear what issue the program has identified.

The dialogue box then provides an option to choose the preferred phrase. For example, the dialogue box shows ‘self-esteem’ used 17 times and ‘self esteem’ 3 times. The program selects the term used most frequently (i.e. ‘self-esteem’), and highlights all instances of the one it assumes is an error (i.e. ‘self esteem’), plus the surrounding text. The editor can then look through each instance, clicking on ‘Fix’ for those that are incorrect, and ignoring those that are okay.

The user also has the option of choosing ‘self-esteem’ as the preferred phrase, in which case the program will highlight all the uses of ‘self esteem’, and the user can again fix those that are incorrect. Helpfully, the program not only highlights the term in the dialogue box; it also moves through the text of the Word document, so that the screen shows the part of the text where the potential error is located. This makes it easy to see if, for example, the apparent misuse is actually part of a reference, and is therefore not to be changed.

As it works through different issues, the program will also pick up any uses of the term ‘selfesteem’ under a different error description—‘An individual word is used with and without a hyphen/dash’.



### Putting the program into use

I tried running *PerfectIt* on an unedited document, but found the result rather overwhelming. Instead, I use it at the proofreading stage, running it as a final check to pick up anything I might have missed. It's very satisfying to see the program speeding through its different functions and coming up with the message 'Test passed!' when it checks a particular issue and finds no errors.

Another thing I like to do is to generate an abbreviation list from *PerfectIt* and use that to double check the list that I have generated manually.

### Summing up

You can download *PerfectIt* and try it for free for 30 days. It is reasonably priced, easy to use and well worth investing in (and no, I'm not being paid for this endorsement, even though I probably sound like an advert for the software package!).

*Hilary Cadman*

Cadman Editing Services

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