

LIVE EDIT DEMO

Demonstration: Fixing a Text (a TOC example)

Tonight we're working through a student-submitted *Theory of Change* in real time. We'll read it, find the problems, edit it together, and arrive at something sharper, more honest, and more convincing without adding a single word of extra ambition.

Meet "GreenPlate Winnipeg"

A fictional social enterprise we'll use as our editing subject tonight.

What They Do

Run cooking workshops in North End Winnipeg, specifically for newcomer families

How They Source

Use donated surplus produce from local farms, reducing food waste as a co-benefit

What They Want

Reduce food insecurity and build community among newcomer populations

How They're Funded

Mix of small grants and sliding-scale workshop fees

This is the student's submitted *Theory of Change* one page. Let's read it together and find the problems.

The Original Draft

"In today's society, food insecurity is a very important issue that affects many people around the world, and especially in Canada. It is important to note that newcomers to Canada face unique challenges when it comes to accessing affordable and culturally appropriate food. GreenPlate Winnipeg was created in order to address this problem by providing cooking workshops that help newcomer families learn to cook healthy meals using locally sourced produce that would otherwise go to waste."

  **STOP HERE.** Count the phrases that could be cut without losing any real information. How many did you find?

Cutting the Fluff

Problems Identified

- **"In today's society"** — throat-clearing. Cut it entirely.
- **"very important issue that affects many people"** — vague and obvious. Say something specific.
- **"It is important to note that"** — pure filler. Just say the thing.
- **"when it comes to"** — wordy. Replace with a single word.
- **"was created in order to"** — passive and padded. Use "GreenPlate addresses..."
- **"would otherwise go to waste"** — actually good. Keep it.

Revised Version

"Newcomers to Canada struggle to access affordable, culturally appropriate food. GreenPlate Winnipeg addresses this through cooking workshops that teach newcomer families to prepare healthy meals using surplus local produce that would otherwise go to waste."

73 words → 35 words.

The Original Draft Continues

"Our theory of change is that by running cooking workshops, participants will gain knowledge and skills which will empower them and lead to improved health outcomes and stronger community bonds. The workshops will also help to potentially reduce food waste in the city. Through these activities, we believe that GreenPlate can create meaningful social impact and contribute to the overall well-being of the community. We hope that participants will change their behaviour and make healthier food choices going forward, and that this will have a ripple effect on their families and broader social networks."

- 📄 🛑 **STOP HERE.** This single paragraph contains at least **6 major problems**. Read it again. Identify as many as you can before we go through them together on the next slide.

Fixing the Logic Chain

1 **Missing Links**
"Workshops... empowerment... improved health." Three steps were skipped. What connects a cooking class to health outcomes?

2 **Passive Hope**
"We believe" and "we hope." Not good enough. A Theory of Change is an *argument*, not a wish list.

3 **Vague Outcomes**
"Meaningful social impact" and "overall well-being" mean nothing. What *specifically* changes for which people?

4 **Hedging**
"Help to potentially reduce." Nope. Commit to your claim with evidence.

5 **Scope Creep**
"Ripple effect on broader social networks." Can a 12-week cooking workshop honestly claim this? Probably not.

6 **No Mechanism**
"Participants will change their behaviour." Are you sure? Why?

The Revised Theory of Change

Framing

GreenPlate operates at the **micro level**: **individual and household behaviour change through skill-building**. It does not claim to solve food insecurity, which is structural.

Outputs

Participants learn **24 recipes adapted to available Canadian ingredients** while maintaining cultural food preferences. Each family receives a take-home ingredient kit weekly.

Medium-Term Outcomes

Household food spending shifts toward fresh produce. Participants **form peer networks that persist** beyond the program, tracked through a **6-month follow-up**.

Activities

Weekly 2-hour cooking workshops (12-week cycle) teach **15 newcomer families** to prepare nutritious meals using **affordable, locally available ingredients**, including surplus produce from partner farms.

Short-Term Outcomes

Participants report increased confidence in meal planning and **reduced reliance on processed convenience foods** — measured by **pre/post survey**.

Stated Limitation

The program addresses one barrier (**cooking skills and ingredient access**) while honestly acknowledging that income, housing, and policy are beyond its scope.

What Changed — Side by Side

Dimension	Before	After
Specificity	"Improved health outcomes" / "meaningful social impact"	"24 recipes" / "15 families" / "12-week cycle"
Voice	"We hope" / "we believe"	States the logic chain with less hedging
Logic	Workshops → ??? → empowerment	Full mechanism explained step by step
Honesty	"Ripple effect on broader social networks"	Claims micro-level impact only; names limits up front
Measurability	No metrics, no method	Pre/post survey + 6-month follow-up



The revised version is actually **shorter** than the original. Precision = depth.

YOUR TURN

Editing Exercise

Exchange your **Assignment 4 (Theory of Change)** on your laptop or phone.

5 Minutes — Work Alone

1. Circle every instance of "we believe," "we hope," "it is important," or "in today's society"
2. Find one place where you skipped a step in your logic chain
3. Ask: did I name my limitations honestly, or did I overclaim?

5 Minutes — Swap with Partner

Read their Theory of Change. Your job is to find exactly:

1. Missing logic links
2. Sentences you would cut entirely

What to Carry Forward

1 **Cut 20% — your writing will be stronger, not weaker**

Trimming throat-clearing and filler phrases sharpens your argument.

2 **A Theory of Change is an argument, not a wish list**

Replace "we hope" and "we believe" with a stated mechanism.

3 **Specificity beats ambition**

"15 families learn 24 recipes" is more convincing than "we will transform the community."

4 **Name your limitations before someone else does**

Stating what your program cannot do builds credibility and signals intellectual honesty.

5 **Every paragraph needs one job**

If you can't summarize it in a phrase, rewrite it. Confusion in structure signals confusion in thinking.