

Proofreading 101

Why should you proofread?

Careless errors weaken intelligent arguments. Would you respect someone who wrote “I recived m digree form hre”? These mistakes distract your audience and damage your credibility as an author. Frequently, these errors are the difference between earning an A- or a B+ on a project. Proofreading should be the final step before you hand in a paper, and it is one of the most crucial elements of the writing process.

Typical Types of Proofreading Errors



Homonyms: where/were there/their/they're due/do

Misspellings: until/untill despair/dispair persue/pursue

Wrong Words: affect/effect form/from then/than

Missed Words: After I came home, found my cat was asleep.

Punctuation: Then he regretted his behavior he wished he had apologized.

Proofreading Strategies



Method	Areas it helps
Take a break	All
Read your paper aloud	Homonyms, Wrong Words, Missed Words, Punctuation
Read sentences in isolation	All
Use Spell/Grammar Check	Wrong Words, Punctuation, Misspellings
Be aware of your most common errors	All
Exchange papers	All

Are you proofreading or just scanning for errors? Try reading these quotes to find all the mistakes. (*Hint: The quotes contain a total of 14 errors.*)

“Commen sense is te most widly shared commodity in the world, fr every man is convinced that he is well supplied wth it.”
Rene Descartes

“The woman who has only been taught too please wll soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams, and that they can not have much affect on her husband’s heart when they are seen every day, when the summer is passed and gone.”
Mary Wollstonecraft

“Beauty in things exhists in the mind which contemplates them.” David Hume

“People due not wish to appear foolish; to avoid the appearance of foolishness, they willing to remain actually fools.”
Alice Walker

“Satire is a sort off glass wherein beholders do generally discover everybodys face but their own.”
Jonathan Swift

How did you do? Proofreading can be a tedious, but it is a crucial component of the writing process. Try these methods. You might find that your next paper does not have as many marks from your instructor.

Using MS Word Grammar Checker



1. When in Word, go into the Tools menu, and click on Options.
2. Click on the Spelling and Grammar Tab
3. Make Sure Grammar and Style are selected or that the program is set in Formal Mode
4. Click Ok.
5. Select Spelling and Grammar . . .

The program will check for spelling errors, punctuation mistakes, and usage mistakes (ex. passive voice). However, do exercise caution! Sometimes it will suggest incorrect “corrections” so be sure to read over the suggestion before accepting it. You are the author, not Microsoft!

Script for Proofreading

Take a Break

All nighters and proofreading effectively do not mix well. You can proofread more efficiently when you have taken a break from your paper. Say you finish your paper on Wednesday night, but it is not due until Friday. Do not proofread Wednesday night. You will be tired and too attached to the paper. When you return to your paper, Thursday morning, you will see errors you would not have seen the day before, and you might even see possible areas for revision. If you are burning the midnight oil, take at least a ten minute break to get coffee. It is not as effective as a good night's sleep, but your proofreading abilities will increase.

Read your paper aloud

By reading your paper aloud, you have to focus on every aspect of your paper, instead of checking the parts you recently finished. This method helps you to catch careless errors. Frequently, you will correct these errors as you read, and if you say anything you did not write, check your work. This strategy also allows you to hear your paper. You will know if your paper flows or if it sounds choppy.

Read sentences in isolation

This method is best reserved for your final draft. Read your paper backwards sentence by sentence. When people read their work, they become wrapped up in their arguments. By reading your paper backwards, you have to assess each sentence to determine if it makes sense and to see if all punctuation is placed properly.

Use Spell/Grammar Check

Microsoft Word and Corel's Word Perfect possess built in grammar checkers. These programs are not perfect, but they act as an extra pair of eyes. If the program underlines something in green, check it. The Spelling and Grammar Checkers on your computer will not catch everything, but the computer programs help.

Be aware of your most common errors

You know your work the best. If you know you have trouble with commas, you need to check every time you use a coordinating conjunction. Although we all make careless errors, these mistakes can be overcome. Each writer makes different mistakes, and when you are familiar with your work, it will be easier to catch mistakes.

Exchange Papers

An extra opinion of your work always helps you to reflect about your writing. When other people see your writing, they do not see that argument that makes perfect sense to you and critical feedback improves the quality of your drafts. If you know you have a particular problem with, for example, commas, and if you have not used a comma correctly in years, call the Writing Lab, and we will help you learn those rules and develop the skills to catch those errors. We focus on process over product, and we want to help you become a more developed and skillful writer.

Exercise Key

“Common sense is the most widely shared commodity in the world, for every man is convinced that he is well supplied with it.” Rene Descartes

“The woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams, and that they cannot have much effect on her husband’s heart when they are seen every day, when the summer is passed and gone.” Mary Wollstonecraft

“Beauty in things exists in the mind which contemplates them.” David Hume

“People do not wish to appear foolish; to avoid the appearance of foolishness, they are willing to remain actually fools.” Alice Walker

“Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody’s face but their own.” Jonathan Swift

Note: Grammar Checker only catches 10 of the 14 errors.