



How to Proofread

Before You Proofread

Do all your editing first! You don't want to waste your time with text you will change or cut.

Take a break. If you proofread immediately after you write, you might not "see" your mistakes. Take a walk or a nap to refresh your eyes.

Choose a good time and place. Eliminate distractions: do not proofread with music, TV or noise in the background. Pick a time and place where you can comfortably focus.

Be prepared to proofread more than once. When you have finished your proofreading, set the writing aside – ideally overnight – then return to it again the next day.

When You Proofread

Use your voice. Read the whole essay aloud and make changes as you go; then go back and read it aloud again, one sentence at a time. If something "sounds" wrong, it probably is!

Know and understand your teacher's comments. Understand the comments and notes made on your past assignments (for example, POS, WW, Frag, ROS, CN, //ism).

Keep a personalized grammar checklist of "Errors to Proofread For." If you know the common mistakes you make, you'll know what to check for in your writing.

Use your computer to help. Spellchecking does not catch all the errors, but you can use it strategically. Use the "search" function to check for common problems like "it's" versus "its;" "there," "their, and "they're;" "your" versus "you're;" and "to," "two," and "too".

Find a style of proofreading that works for you. You may find it easier to proofread a paper version instead of the digital version. If you find you "skip over" errors by reading too fast, use a ruler or another piece of paper to hide the lines below the one you are reading.

Try it backwards. If you don't notice all your errors when you read start-to-finish, try going one sentence at a time backwards through the paper.

Use the Learning Centre! The Learning Centre tutors are happy help you improve your writing skills.



Common Errors to Look For When You Proofread

- Sentence Fragments:** Do your sentences have subjects and verbs and a complete idea, so that they can ‘stand-alone’? Are any subordinate/ dependent clauses (for example, beginning with “because”) treated like main /independent clauses?
- Run-on Sentences and Comma Splices:** Do you connect independent clauses with only a comma and without a conjunction? Do you have several clauses joined together? Are there separate ideas linked in a sentence that should be separated with a period?
- Unwanted repetition:** Did you use the same word too often/too close to a previous use of it?
- Noun phrase errors:** Do all your singular countable nouns have articles (a, an, the) or determiners (my, your, this, that...) in front of them? Did you use non-count nouns without a “the” to mean “all or any” of an uncountable thing, and “the” to mean a specific group or subset of that thing?
- Article errors:** Did you correctly use “a” and “the”? “A” means “one thing of this kind, any one.” Use “the” when being more specific and there is only one thing in the category or situation.
- Pronoun errors:** Do your pronouns have clear antecedents? Is it easy to tell which noun they refer to? Do they agree with their antecedents in gender, case and number? Did you use gender-neutral pronouns (e.g. “he/she” or “they”) where appropriate?
- Subject-verb agreement:** Are you using the correct form of the verb for the subject? This especially applies in the case of the simple present (“I like/ you like/ she likes”) and present perfect (“I have/ you have/ he has”).
- Parallelism:** Do two or more phrases or clauses in a sentence have the same grammatical structure? For example, if writing a list, each verb, noun or phrase in the list should be in the same form.
- Parts of speech/ word form errors:** Are words that need to be nouns *actually* nouns? Are the adjectives *actually* adjectives? If you have used the wrong form of the word (usually the wrong suffix), how can you change it?
- Active versus passive voice:** Have you primarily used active voice? Other than commonly used passive constructions (“the telephone was invented by Alexander Graham Bell), effective writers tend to rely on active voice.
- Verb tense errors:** Have you used appropriate verb tenses? Are the tenses consistent with each other? Narratives about experiences tend to be in the past tense; writing about literature tends to be in the present; descriptions of actions in pictures is usually in present continuous.
- Punctuation errors:** Did you use commas and periods (or, for more advanced writers, semicolons and colons) correctly? Have you over-used exclamation marks? Have you used quotation marks for short quotes?

