

Proofreading Tips

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What is proofreading?

Proofreading is the process of reading a document to correct technical errors. Proofreading is different from revision (another important step in writing), because proofreading is detail-oriented and focuses on technical mistakes rather than style or content changes.

In the process of proofreading, your goal is to detect and correct typographical, grammatical, spelling, formatting, and punctuation errors. Revision, on the other hand, focuses on the content of the document; for example, making sure that an argument is strongly supported or that ideas flow logically throughout the paper. Proofreading should be the very last step in the writing process, right after revision.

Proofreading Tips

1. Allow at least a few hours between revision and proofreading. You'll need to distance yourself from your writing before you can view it objectively.
2. Schedule plenty of time for proofreading. If you feel rushed, you're less likely to catch mistakes.
3. If you remember what's coming next, you'll often read what you expect to see instead of what's really on the page. To avoid this, read your paper in reverse, from end to beginning, sentence by sentence.
4. If possible, read each sentence both silently and aloud. Your ears may catch mistakes your eyes missed.
5. Proofread your paper multiple times, checking for different types of mistakes (spelling, grammar, punctuation, formatting) each time.
6. If possible, proofread on paper, not from a screen. When reading from a screen, you're more likely to scan through information and miss details.
7. Don't forget to proofread the title and any subheadings, footnotes, or endnotes. Every word counts.
8. Spellcheck is a useful tool, but it can't be relied upon to catch every mistake. Watch out for homonyms (words that share the same spelling or pronunciation but have different meanings) and double check proper nouns (such as the spelling of a person's name).
9. If you notice that you consistently make the same error (for example, using "it's" for "its" or "effect" for "affect"), write it down. Then, go back through the paper, find every occurrence of the problematic word, and make sure you've corrected every instance of the mistake. The search feature in your word processor can be useful for this step.
10. Check that your verb tense remains consistent throughout the document and that any changes in tense are intentional and purposeful.
11. Make sure formatting is consistent throughout the paper. For example, check that indentation for each paragraph is the same, that you always have a single space between sentences, that all citations include a hanging indent, and that your font is uniform.
12. Double check all quotations, paraphrases, summaries, and statistics. Make sure that the wording of quotes matches the original exactly and that all quotes are enclosed in quotation marks. Check that you've provided proper attribution for all information from outside sources.
13. Pay close attention to numbers. It can be easy to overlook an added or missing digit, period, or comma, which can result in a drastic change in meaning.
14. Ask a friend to help. If you don't know something is wrong, you can't fix it. A peer reviewer may be able to recognize mistakes you didn't know you'd made.
15. For additional help with proofreading and revision, visit the ELAC Reading and Writing Center online at www.elacreadingwritingcenter.org or in person at **E3-220**.