

Tips for Effective Proofreading

Proofreading your work is an essential part of the writing process. This means that you cannot do it at the last minute, or in a rush. Always leave yourself enough time to proofread your document more than once, and carefully. Most importantly, do not try to proofread immediately on finishing your paper: you need some distance to do the job effectively.

Print out your document for proofreading:

Do not try to do it on your computer screen. It can be useful to read one line at a time, keeping the rest of the page covered.

Read your work aloud, slowly.

Just looking at it can trick the mind into seeing what it expects to see, not what is actually there. Reading aloud will help you to see mistakes such as words that have been left out, spelling mistakes, and plural words without the final /s/. Reading aloud will also help you to make sure that the meaning of the sentence as a whole is clear.

If you know that you make the same errors in your writing, you should compile a checklist so that you can check this against each completed piece of writing. Knowing the errors you make will help you to avoid making the same mistakes over and over again. If necessary, contact the Writing Specialist or a Peer Writing Tutor for help in identifying your common or repeated errors.

Make proofreading as easy as possible:

It is helpful to read for only one type of error at a time; for example, check for punctuation errors on the first reading. Make sure you also apply the items on your checklist.

If you have problems with spelling, try writing out the problem words in different ways, rather than just using spellcheck or reaching for the dictionary. This will help to improve your visual memory, so that you feel more confident in correcting your spelling.

Make sure that facts (such as references, names, and number combinations) are clearly written and correct. Double check these if necessary.

Pay special attention to homophones - words that sound the same but are spelt differently and have different meanings; for example:

there and their

two and too

Good proofreaders

Have a good visual memory - they can usually spot when a word looks wrong.

Know the most common spelling rules in English.

Look at the meaning of a piece of text to make sure it makes sense as well as checking the spellings of individual words.

Are aware of possible and probable letter combinations; for example, every word in English must contain a vowel sound.

Good proofreaders

Do not rely on the computer spellcheck to find every mistake; it will not pick up errors such as using bean instead of been.

Use a reliable dictionary or thesaurus; computer translation programs can be unreliable.

When in doubt, always check their facts or use a grammar reference.

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