



## Graduate Online Writing Studio

### Proofreading Strategies

After you finish revising your work, you will complete the final step of the writing process: proofreading. The proofreading process involves identifying and correcting grammatical, spelling, and formatting errors or inconsistencies throughout the paper. Although the Writing Studio does not proofread student papers, we recommend the following tips that can help you to maximize the proofreading process:

**1. Take a break before proofreading for a fresh perspective on your work.**

Sometimes, trying to proofread immediately after you finish writing and revising can leave you too familiar with the text to notice mistakes that may still remain in the work. Setting the paper aside for a few hours can give you a fresh pair of eyes for proofreading that can help you catch issues in the text.

**2. Create a quiet, distraction-free environment for concentration while proofreading.**

Proofreading requires careful reading. You will want to create the right environment for concentration as you do during pleasure reading. Select a quiet place as free from distractions as possible. Put your phone and other electronic devices aside and give yourself enough time to focus on reading your paper carefully.

**3. Vary the way you read the paper to catch errors you previously missed.**

Reading a paper multiple times helps during proofreading, and varying the way you read the paper can also provide a fresh vantage point. Consider printing the paper if you have only read it on a screen since the brain processes printed works differently than those on electronic screens. You may also consider reading the paper aloud to catch errors you may have read over when reading silently. You can also ask another person to read through the paper as a second pair of eyes to catch any remaining errors that you may have missed.

**4. Read the paper in reverse, focusing on each sentence individually.**

Reading the paper from back to front can help you to focus on the sentences themselves and any surface issues within them rather than focusing on the meaning of the sentences in the context of the paper. Looking at each sentence individually can also help to break down the sentences and their basic structures and word choices to notice remaining errors. This process might also help you identify overused words and sentences in need of further clarification or explanation.

**5. Use spell checkers with care, paying close attention to not introduce new, unintended errors.**

Using a spell checker can help you to catch typographical and grammatical errors in the paper. However, spell checkers should be used carefully as they are not fool proof and can miss errors when words are misused but spelled correctly. They can also introduce errors as they attempt to correct spelling errors intuitively by suggesting incorrect words.

**6. Look out for commonly mistaken words as well as previous common errors.**

Some words look or sound similar and are commonly mistaken by many writers. The examples below include commonly misused words that you may want to keep in mind as you proofread:

affect vs. effect	accept vs. except	capital vs. capitol
emigrate vs. immigrate	ensure vs. insure	every day vs. everyday
farther vs. further	its vs. it's	lie vs. lay
lose vs. loose	past vs. passed	set vs. sit
than vs. then	that vs. which	their vs. there vs. they're
to vs. too vs. two	who vs. whom	your vs. you're

Every writer also presents common mistakes that repeatedly appear in their work. If you know you have a habit of using contractions (e.g., can't, isn't) or second person pronouns (you, your) in your formal writing, for instance, watch for those issues as you proofread.

You can also use Word's "Find" feature to catch these common errors. Pressing the Ctrl key (or the Command key ⌘ if you are using a Mac) and the F key at the same time in Microsoft Word will pull up the "Find" feature, which will allow you to search for words or punctuation you want to double check. For example, if you have a habit of using second person in your formal writing and want to remove the second person pronouns from your paper, you could search for the word "you" to ensure that you find every usage of second person throughout the paper as you proofread.

**7. Verify that you spell all names correctly and list numbers correctly.**

Since proofreading involves the careful and close reading of a paper, it presents the opportunity to verify specific and important information. As you proofread, verify that all names of companies, products, people, and titles are spelled, capitalized, and punctuated correctly (e.g., McDonald's rather than Mcdonalds). You should also verify that all numbers in the paper are expressed correctly and accurately to avoid confusing or misleading the reader.

Although proofreading often focuses on lower-order concerns like grammar and punctuation errors, it presents the opportunity to polish your work and ensure that the reader receives the best version of your paper with all your ideas communicated as clearly and accurately as possible.