

Strategies for Proofreading

This guideline is designed to help you, the writer, proofread more effectively

- by giving you some useful strategies for proofreading well
- by giving you strategies to catch the common errors that you personally would often make
- by giving you specific strategies for finding and correcting those errors.

GENERAL STRATEGIES

- Begin by taking a break. Allow yourself a little time in between writing and proofing. The goal is to give you a fresh eye and mind to see your mistakes more clearly.
- Try to s-l-o-w d-o-w-n as you read through the paper; this should help you catch mistakes that you would normally pass by.
- Read the paper aloud to allow yourself to concentrate on each word, starting with the last sentence of your paper and continuing to the beginning.
- Read your paper with a cover by sliding a blank sheet of paper down the page as you read. This will help you look at the paper line by line.
- Reading the paper aloud also gives you the chance to see yourself as the audience and help you to perceive your words in a different way.

PERSONALIZED PROOFREADING

- Try to discover what types of errors you make on a regular basis.
- Review some of your past papers to find out which mistakes your instructor commented on or see a Writing Center tutor that could aid you in finding those mistakes.
- Learn how to fix the errors by using a reference book or consulting a Writing Center tutor, so that you understand those mistakes.

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES FOR PROOFREADING

- For spelling: Remember that spell-check does not always catch everything.
 1. Examine each word in the paper individually. Move from the end of each line back to the beginning. Also, pointing with a pencil helps you really see each word.
 2. If necessary, check a dictionary to see that each word is spelled correctly. Dictionaries can be found in the Library or in the Writing Center.
- For compound sentence commas:

See whether there is a complete sentence on each side of the conjunction. If there is, place a comma before the conjunction. Conjunctions are and, but, for, or, nor, so and yet.
- For comma splices:
 1. Skim the paper and stop at every comma.
 2. Check to see if there is a complete sentence on each side of the comma. If there is, add a coordinating conjunction after the comma or replace the comma with a semicolon (;).
- For run-on sentences:

1. Review each sentence to see if there is more than one independent clause. Start with the last sentence of your paper by reading it aloud, and check every sentence all the way back to the beginning.
 2. Break the sentence into two separate sentences if it is necessary.
- For apostrophes:
 1. Skim your paper, stopping only at those words that end in “s”.
 2. See whether or not each “s” word needs an apostrophe or not.
 - For left-out words:

Read your paper aloud, pointing to every word as you read. Don’t move on to the next word until you have finished reading the previous word. Also, make sure that you have not doubled any words.

This handout originated from the Purdue University Writing Lab. Cory A. Wielert has modified it. 1999