

## Proofreading Your Paper

When reading through your completed paper, it is very easy to miss errors. This handout will help you to learn how to proofread more effectively and find more of your errors.

**Before you proofread your work for grammar and punctuation errors, you should look at your paper as a complete document in terms of the following areas:**

### Content

- Have you done everything the assignment requires?
- Are the claims you make accurate and consistent?
- If it is required, does your paper make an argument?
- Is the argument complete?
- Have you supported each point with adequate evidence?
- Is all of the information in your paper relevant to the assignment and/or your overall writing goal?

### Overall structure

- Does your paper have an appropriate introduction and conclusion?
- Is your thesis clearly stated in your introduction?
- Is it clear how each paragraph in the body of your paper is related to your thesis?
- Are the paragraphs arranged in a logical sequence?
- Have you made clear transitions between paragraphs?

### Structure within paragraphs

- Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence?
- Does each paragraph have one main idea?
- Are there any extraneous or missing sentences in any of your paragraphs?

### Clarity

- Have you defined any important terms that might be unclear to your reader?
- Is the meaning of each sentence clear?
- Is it clear what each pronoun (he, she, it, they, which, who, this, etc.) refers to?
- Have you chosen the proper words to express your ideas? Avoid using words you find in the thesaurus that are not part of your normal vocabulary; you may misuse them.

## Style

- Have you used an appropriate and consistent tone (formal, informal, persuasive, etc.)?
- Is your use of gendered language (male and female pronouns like "he" or "she," or words like "fireman" that contain "man,") appropriate?
- Have you varied the length and structure of your sentences?
- Have you limited the use of the passive voice in your writing?
- Have you limited the use of unnecessary phrases like "there is," "there are," "due to the fact that," etc.?

## Citations

- Have you appropriately cited quotes, paraphrases, and ideas you got from your sources?
- Are your citations in the correct format (APA, MLA, etc.)?

## Proofreading Tips and Strategies

- **Find out what errors you typically make.** Review instructors' comments about your writing and/or review your paper with a writing tutor.
- **Learn how to fix those errors.** Talk with your instructor and/or with a writing tutor to understand how to fix the errors.
- **Give yourself enough time to proofread.** To proofread your paper properly, you will need to read it several times – each time with a different purpose.
- **Each time you proofread your paper, select a different focus.** If you know you have trouble with a specific grammar point, such as subject-verb agreement (He likes it. They like it.), then proofread your paper for that one point. Your skills will get better with practice.
- **Are your sentences clear and easy to read?** When a sentence does not flow well as you read, consider changing it. If you, as the writer, have difficulty reading it, then the reader will almost certainly have trouble with it as well.

Consider the writing problems you have (or might have) and try the following strategies

### General Strategies:

<b>Take a break</b>	When you finishing the paper, take a break before proofreading it. While proofreading, take short breaks and only read for short blocks of time.
<b>Read aloud</b>	Reading aloud will sometimes reveal errors. Pay close attention to any place where you hesitate while reading – your eyes may have noticed something your brain did not expect. You might consider recording yourself while reading and then listen to the recording to find your errors.
<b>Check for your common errors</b>	Each time you read a section of your paper, choose only one of your common errors to search for. Check carefully and watch for the small details. Your skill will improve with practice.
<b>Use a cover as you read</b>	This will help you focus on your writing line by line.
<b>Read slowly</b>	This will help you focus on each word. Maintain focus until the end of each sentence. Watch for spelling errors.
<b>Read backwards</b>	Begin with the last sentence of your paper and read each sentence in reverse order to search for grammar errors.

Adapted from The Purdue University Online Writing Lab at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu> and The Writing Centre at the University of North Carolina at <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/>