

Tips for Effective Proofreading

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| Give it a rest | If time allows, set your text aside for a few hours (or days) after you've finished composing, and then proofread it with fresh eyes. Rather than remember the perfect paper you meant to write, you're more likely to see what you've actually written. |
| Concentrate | If you're going to spot mistakes, then you need to concentrate. That means getting rid of distractions and potential interruptions. Switch off the cell phone, turn off the television or radio and stay away from the email. |
| Look for one type of problem at a time | Read through your text several times, concentrating first on sentence structures, then word choice, then spelling, and finally punctuation. As the saying goes, if you look for trouble, you're likely to find it. |
| Review a hard copy | Print out your text and review it line by line: rereading your work in a different format may help you catch errors that you previously missed. |
| Read your text backward | Another way to catch spelling errors is to read backward, from right to left, starting with the last word in your text. Doing this will help you focus on individual words rather than on sentences. |
| Read your text aloud | You may hear a problem that you haven't been able to see. Ask a colleague to take turns reading it out loud with you, to catch errors and awkward-sounding phrases and to proof numbers. |
| Check the numbers. | Stating that the value of the farm was \$10,000 instead of \$100,000 is definitely not the same thing. What about the yield of potatoes? Was it 1.2 million pounds or 1.2 billion pounds? Make sure your numbers are correct. |
| Watch out for homonyms, contractions and apostrophes | <p>Homonyms are words that share the same spelling or pronunciation but have different meanings. Switching <i>accept</i> with <i>except</i> or <i>you</i> with <i>ewe</i> could be disastrous, so look for them.</p> <p>In addition, people often mix <i>their</i> and <i>they're</i>, <i>its</i> and <i>it's</i>, <i>your</i> and <i>you're</i> and so on. These kinds of errors immediately hurt the credibility of your text.</p> <p>Finally, remember that apostrophes do not get used to form plurals. You discuss the horses in the pasture, not the horse's (or horses') in the pasture.</p> |
| Check the punctuation | Focusing on the words is good, but check the punctuation as well. Pay attention to capitalized words, missing or extra commas, and periods used incorrectly. For adverse decision letters, don't use exclamation points |
| Use a spellchecker and your dictionary | The spellchecker can help you catch repeated words, reversed letters, and many other common errors, but be sure to check the suggested changes before you accept them, since spellcheckers are not always 100 percent accurate. Also, use your dictionary if you question whether or not you have used the right word. For example, would you find sand in a desert or in a dessert? |
| Create your own proofreading checklist | Keep a list of the types of mistakes you commonly make, and then refer to that list each time you proofread. |
| Ask for help | Ask someone else to proofread your text after you have reviewed it. A new set of eyes may immediately spot errors that you've overlooked, and a second person will be in a better position to evaluate whether what you've written makes sense or not. |