

Writing Process: Proofreading and Editing

Everyone makes mistakes in grammar, syntax, punctuation and spelling. No one likes to see them, and they should not appear in your final paper. There are many ways to correct errors, and it is a good idea to get into the habit of doing the work yourself because there will be plenty of times when you will not have someone to do this for you. Here are a few tips on how you can proofread and edit your own writing.

TAKE SOME TIME OFF

When you are writing, there is often a gap between what you mean to write and what you actually write. Give yourself a day to get some distance from your writing, so you can return to it as a fresh reader. Wait at least six hours before proofreading. Twenty-four hours is ideal. Start writing early so you have time to proofread.

READ OUT LOUD

Print out your paper and then touch each word as you read it out loud. Also touch the punctuation and say the name of the punctuation. (Actually say "period" when you touch a period.) This will slow you down and make you pay attention to each word and punctuation mark. You will hear if any sentences do not make sense.

PROOFREAD WITH A PARTNER

Print two copies of your paper, and have a friend read your paper while you read along. Sometimes, a sentence that you understand can be confusing for a reader. If your friend misunderstands a sentence or word, try to rephrase the sentence so it communicates your intended meaning.

LOOK FOR THE SAME MISTAKES

Each time you make an error, *it likely was committed elsewhere in your essay*. As you look for mistakes, pay attention to any word combinations and grammar, punctuation or spelling situations that resemble ones you got wrong before. Once you spot and correct an error, it is a good idea to read your essay looking just for that mistake while it's fresh in your mind.

CONSIDER YOUR ESSAY A COMPLETE PACKAGE

Make sure that everything you have written is connected to your main idea. Your main idea should be clearly stated in the thesis statement, usually the last sentence of your introduction. Each paragraph should have a topic sentence to make clear how the paragraph relates to the main thesis. Be sure that your essay answers the question or fulfills the task that the teacher assigned.

YOU ARE SMARTER THAN SPELL CHECK

You should use spell check and grammar check, but do not just approve every change that is suggested. Make sure you know what spelling of a word you want. Spell check will not correct misspellings if the misspelling is also a word. Also, spell check will try to change names to words. Only approve a spell check or grammar check change if you know the rule.

COMMON ERRORS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Run on sentences and comma splices.

Paragraphs that are too long or too short (a paragraph should be about half a page).

Sentences that are too long and confusing (avoid sentences longer than two lines).

Incorrect article use.

Spelling, or using the wrong word (if you are not sure of a word, look it up).

Subject/verb agreement.

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