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Proofreading Your Own Work

**Proofreading is a final check on your work to ensure spelling, grammar, punctuation and general presentation is of a good standard.**

**Proofreading your own work can be difficult.**

Sometimes we write the way that we would speak, and that way is not always grammatically correct. When we proofread our work, we do not see those errors, so we do not correct them.

Another problem with proofreading your own work is that it is hard to truly read what is on the paper because it is already ingrained in your memory. Rather than reading the print, you are reciting the text from your mind. What you read as being on the paper and what is actually there can be two very different things.

You can, however, improve your proofreading by looking at the following components:

**Spelling**

The most obvious proofreading errors are often **spelling** ones.

It’s natural to rely on software spellcheckers, however do:

* Make sure that you’re using one that uses **British** and not American English
* Double check your spelling using a separate **dictionary** – either online or in paper copy - if you’re in any doubt

**Grammar**

Grammar can be defined as **“the study of how words and their component parts combine to form sentences”.**

**Remember!**

* A **noun** is a naming word and a **verb** is an action word. There should be at least one noun and one verb in every sentence
* Keep your **singular and plurals** clear. If using a singular noun, use a singular verb; if using a plural noun, use a plural verb
* Avoid double negatives. e.g. **no not never**
* If possible, sentences should be **complete thoughts** and not fragments
* Make sure to use the correct **tense** when writing

**Punctuation**

Punctuation is the **set of marks** used to regulate texts and clarify their meanings, principally by separating or linking words, phrases, and clauses.

At best, poor punctuation makes writing **hard to read**. At worst, it can totally **change the sense** of something ….

**Remember!**

* At the end of every sentence you need a **full stop,** a **question mark** oran **exclamation mark**
* A **capital letter** should be used for the names of places, people and things. ‘I’ should also be capitalised as well as the first letter of each sentence
* Use **colons** to introduce lists e.g. *There are three main reasons for the success of the government: economic, social and political*
* **Dashes** are more common in informal writing
* Use **semi-colons** instead of full stops to separate two main clauses e.g. *Spanish is spoken throughout South America; in Brazil the main language is Portuguese.*
* Use **commas** to separate words or phrases that mark where the voice would pause slightly e.g. *We had, in fact, lost our way.*

**Style**

It is important to look at the overall style of your piece of work as well as checking for any inconsistencies.

You can lose marks if the overall appearance of your work is not of a high standard.

Also, there may be a standard **academic style** used by your organisation. For example, your organisation may request that your submissions have single line spacing and are in Arial font. Or they may specify the pages are numbered in a particular style and that your contents page is done single sided with double line spacing.

**Final Tips**

* Don’t automatically **rely** on spelling/grammar checkers
* Read out **loud** –this means you won’t miss out words
* Read it **slowly** – every word. It’s easy to skip words when reading as often your brain makes a judgement before your eyes have read the word
* Change **the look or format**. Sometimes using a different font – or font size – is enough to help you spot errors
* Try working from a **printout**, not the computer screen
* Get some **distance!** Go away and come back to your work later and read it again. Often you’ll spot errors you hadn’t noticed before
* Do **multiple** read-throughs, looking for one kind of error at a time
* Make sure you leave yourself enough **time** for proofreading. Trying to do it quickly means you are more likely to miss mistakes