Apply Proofreading Strategies

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:≡	WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial defines proofreading, considers the best times to perform proofreading tasks, and identifies what to look for during the process. It includes an example to demonstrate the benefits of careful proofreading.

This tutorial investigates proofreading in four parts:

1. What Is Proofreading?
2. When to Proofread
3. What to Look For During Proofreading
4. Proofreading: Example

1. What Is Proofreading?

Proofreading is the last of the eight steps in the writing process. It involves the identification and correction of errors in grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and formatting.

⑦	DID YOU KNOW

Proofreading is sometimes called proofing.

Even though the two preceding steps in the process, revising and editing, sometimes involve proofreading tasks, this step is most effective when it is performed separately.

⚑	HINT

Revision is re-visioning and rethinking the ideas, organization, and structure of written work. Editing is improving style through word choice and sentence structure. Proofreading focuses on details that include punctuation and spelling. It does not address the broad questions that are asked during the revision and editing steps.

📄	TERM TO KNOW

Proofreading
The process in which errors in grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and formatting are identified and corrected.

2. When to Proofread

It's common for writers to proofread throughout the writing process. However, even writers who proofread as they go should include a final step in their process that is devoted exclusively to proofreading. This last step is necessary because, no matter how impressive the ideas presented in written work may be, they are often not well-received by editors, instructors and other readers who encounter technical/mechanical errors. Time spent proofreading, therefore, is critical to the success (or failure) of written work. Even when you've carefully completed all of the preceding steps in the writing process, your work may not accomplish your purpose if you don't take the time, and make the effort, to proofread.

As a result of its technical focus, proofreading is the one step in the writing process when you can allow another person to help you with your project. This approach is in some ways similar to using a spelling- or grammar-check program to check your work.

🚩 **HINT**

Allowing another person to make changes to your work is a bad idea. If that person's changes impact any other part of the writing process, your work may be considered dishonest and, perhaps, plagiarized.

If you need help proofreading, ask a friend or tutor to identify and explain the errors he or she finds. Based on what they find, and their explanations, you can decide what to do about them (e.g., to make changes or not). By doing so, you'll avoid any dishonesty, including plagiarism. This approach can also be a good way to learn how to proofread, so that you'll be confident enough to perform this step yourself on future projects.

3. What to Look For During Proofreading

During proofreading, check your work for (and correct) the following errors:

- Spelling errors and typos, including mistyped and incorrectly-used words that spelling- and grammar-check programs often miss
- Errors in capitalization
- Errors in punctuation, including the misuse of commas, semicolons, etc.
- Errors in grammar and syntax, including incomplete and run-on sentences, missing or misplaced articles, awkward sentence structure, and the unnecessary use of passive voice
- Errors in quotation format in the body of the written work, and on the reference page or bibliography
- Errors in author attribution in the body (e.g., referring to another writer by first name only)
- Errors in document format (e.g., margins, font, font size, and anything else required by assignment instructions or submission protocols)

🚩 **HINT**

Spell-check programs are useful, but limited. Writers should not depend on them to remove all errors. Spell-check programs will skip words that have been used incorrectly, but are spelled correctly. A grammar-check program that accurately and consistently identifies errors has not yet been developed.

4. Proofreading: Example

Read the following paragraph and see if you can spot all of the typos, errors in punctuation, grammar, syntax, attribution and formatting:

> I'm not a fan of country music even though I grew up on a farm and much of my extended family has horses and cattle but every now and then a song captures my attention in a way I both hate and yearn for. The first time I heard Hank Williams, Jr. warble out *A Country Boy Can Survive*, I couldn't stop listening. Not so much because of the music itself, but because of what Hank says while making it. over the course of four minutes and sixteen seconds, he explains how his knowledge of trout-catching, buck-skinning, and wine-making sets him apart from fancy city-raised folks, folks who are, evidently, doomed to be mugged by implicitly dark-skinned men with switchblade knives. It's the kind of song that starts off a generic if probably honest cheering-on of those who exist on the periphery of society, fairly harmless, but that quickly devolves into an oversimplified and vaguely essayistic denunciation of empire groups of people. You know, Americana.

Did you find five problems? If not, don't worry. Even though proofreading might seem to be a black-and-white, right-or-wrong process, it involves opinion. Here is the version that resulted from proofreading. Note the **bold** parts, which correspond to the changes outlined below.

> I'm not a fan of country **music,** even though I grew up on a farm and much of my extended family has horses and **cattle,** but every now and then a song captures my attention in a way I both hate and yearn for. The first time I heard Hank Williams, Jr. warble out *A Country Boy Can Survive*, I couldn't stop listening. Not so much because of the music itself, but because of what **Williams Jr.** says while making it. **Over** the course of four minutes and sixteen seconds, he explains how his knowledge of trout-catching, buck-skinning, and wine-making sets him apart from fancy city-raised folks, folks who are, evidently, doomed to be mugged by implicitly dark-skinned men with switchblade knives. **It's the kind of song that starts off fairly harmless, a generic if probably honest cheering-on of those who exist on the periphery of society but that quickly devolves into an oversimplified and vaguely essayistic denunciation of entire groups of people.** You know, Americana.

Commas were added to the first sentence to create pauses for readers. Additionally, the writer shouldn't have referred to Hank Williams, Jr. as Hank, because doing so is disrespectful, or too informal (or, possibly, both). He or she also failed to capitalize the "O" in "over." Although the next-to-last sentence was not written incorrectly, it was rephrased to flow more smoothly and logically. The writer misused "empire" in that sentence, so it was changed to "entire," which is clearly the word that was intended.

It's a good idea to proofread everything you write, even short paragraphs in which ideas are fairly well-developed (like this one). By doing so, you'll reduce the possibility of passing along flawed content to readers, and perhaps spare yourself some embarrassment.

☑	SUMMARY

This tutorial examined proofreading, which is the final step of the eight-step writing process. Proofreading involves the identification and correction of errors in grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and formatting. The times when writers should proofread, as well as what to look for during the process, were identified. and an example that demonstrated the positive results of proofreading was provided.

📄 **TERMS TO KNOW**

Proofreading
Fixing grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and formatting errors in an essay or other piece of writing.