

Fact-Checking and Proofreading

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to fact-check and proofread the final draft of your research essay. Specifically, this lesson will focus on:

1. Fact-Checking

Checking your facts is an important part of the revision process because the accuracy of your statements will reflect on the credibility and authority you have with your readers.



DID YOU KNOW

News organizations and magazines employ professional fact-checkers. These workers are responsible for examining every article before it gets published and consulting original sources to make sure the information in the article is accurate. This can involve making phone calls to the people who were interviewed for the article, or looking facts up in encyclopedias, directories, atlases, and online sources. While you can't be expected to have the skills of a professional fact-checker, you do need to reread your writing with a critical eye to the information in it. Submitting an essay with inaccurate content will create far more work later than a simple revision of the document now.

So, when you revise a document, ask yourself the following:

- Does my writing contain any statistics or references that need to be verified?
- Where can I get reliable information to verify it?

It is often useful to do independent verification—that is, look up the fact in a different source from the one where you first got it.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Perhaps a colleague gave you a list of closing averages for the Dow Jones Industrial on certain dates. You still have the list, so you can make sure your document agrees with the numbers your colleague provided. But what if your colleague made a mistake? The websites of the *Wall Street Journal* and other major newspapers list closings for Dow Jones, so it is reasonably easy for you to look up the numbers and verify them independently.

2. Proofreading

When polishing your final draft, it can be helpful to focus your **proofreading** efforts on specific points.

When you consider each point in turn, you will be able to break down the proofreading process into manageable steps. When you have examined each point, you can be confident that you have avoided many possible areas for errors.

Proofreading requires attention to the following:

- Formatting
- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Grammar



TERM TO KNOW

Proofreading

The process of fixing spelling, grammar, and formatting errors in an essay or other piece of writing.

2a. Formatting

Format involves the design expectations of the author and audience. Formatting that is messy or fails to conform to the assignment requirements will reflect poorly on you before the reader even starts to read your essay.

By presenting a document that is properly formatted according to the expectations of your assignment, you will make good impression right from the start. Refer back to the "Developing Your Final Draft" lesson earlier in this unit for a specific list of formatting concerns.

2b. Spelling

Correct spelling is another element essential for your credibility, and errors will be glaringly obvious to many readers. The negative impact on your reputation as a writer, and the perception that you lack attention to detail or do not value your work, will be hard to overcome.

In addition to the negative personal consequences, spelling errors can become factual errors and destroy the value of content. This may lead you to click the "spell check" button in your word-processing program, but computer spell-checking is not enough.

Spell-checkers have improved in the years since they were first invented, but they are not infallible. They can and do make mistakes. A common issue is that your incorrect word may in fact be a word, and therefore, correct according to the program.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Suppose you wrote, "The major will attend the meeting" when you meant to write "The mayor will attend the meeting." The program would miss this error because "major" is a word, but your meaning would be twisted beyond recognition.

2c. Punctuation

Punctuation marks are the traffic signals, signs, and indications that allow us to navigate the written word. They serve to warn us in advance when a transition is coming or the complete thought has come to an end.

➞ **EXAMPLE** A period indicates that the thought is complete, while a comma signals that additional

elements or modifiers are coming.

Correct signals will help your reader follow your thoughts through sentences and paragraphs and enable you to communicate with maximum efficiency while reducing the probability of error.

It may be daunting to realize that the number of possible punctuation errors is as extensive as the number of symbols and constructions available to the author. Software programs may catch many punctuation errors, but again it is the committed writer that makes the difference.

Attached below this tutorial is a supplemental sheet that provides details on how to avoid mistakes with three of the most commonly used punctuation marks: the comma, the semicolon, and the apostrophe.

2d. Grammar

Learning to use good, correct standard English grammar is more of a practice than an event, or even a process. Grammar involves the written construction of meaning from words and involves customs that evolve and adapt to usage over time.

Because grammar is always evolving, none of us can sit back and rest assured that we “know” how to write with proper grammar. Instead, it is important to write and revise with close attention to grammar, keeping in mind that grammatical errors can undermine your credibility, reflect poorly on your essay, and cause misunderstandings.

The attached supplemental sheet also provides tips on avoiding some common grammatical errors.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **fact-checking** is an important part of the revision process because inaccuracies can harm your credibility in the eyes of your readers. Additionally, you learned about several **proofreading** areas to focus on when polishing your final draft: **formatting**, **spelling**, **punctuation**, and **grammar**.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: This content and supplemental material has been adapted from Lumen Learning's "Specific Revision Points to Consider" tutorial.



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