Proofreading Your Work

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☰ WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the role of proofreading in the writing process, as well as how to effectively practice proofreading skills. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. What Is Proofreading?

2. When and How to Proofread

3. Proofreading in Action

1. What Is Proofreading?

Proofreading is the last of the steps in the writing process. It involves the identification and correction of errors in grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and formatting. Even though the two previous steps in the process, revising and editing, sometimes involve proofreading tasks, this step is most effective when it is performed separately.

Remember, revising is re-visioning and rethinking the ideas, organization, and structure of a written work; editing is improving style through word choice and sentence structure. Proofreading focuses on details that include punctuation and spelling, but it does not address the broader questions that are asked during the revising and editing steps.

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

- Spelling errors and typos, including mistyped and incorrectly-used words that spell- 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 words, and awkward sentence structure
- Errors in quotation format in the body of the text

- Errors in citation in the body of the text (e.g., referring to other writers by their first names only) and in the reference page or bibliography
- Errors in document format (e.g., margins, font, font size, and anything else required by assignment instructions or submission guidelines)

> ⚑ **HINT**
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> Spell-check programs are useful, but limited. Writers should not depend on them to remove all errors, as these programs will skip words that have been used incorrectly but are spelled correctly.

> ▤ **TERM TO KNOW**
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> **Proofreading**
> The act of fixing errors in grammar, mechanics, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, commonly confused words, and formatting in an essay or other piece of writing.

2. When and How 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 a 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 a written work. Even when you've carefully completed all of the previous 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 spell- or grammar-check program to check your work. However, allowing another person to actually 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.

Instead, if you need help proofreading, ask a friend or tutor to identify and explain the errors they find. Based on 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. Proofreading in Action

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

Many people agree on the fact that playing sports is good for the humane body. Sports are fun, active ways to engage in teamwork and exercise. Yet, not everybody is included in most sports clubs, teams, and competitions. This, can be considered prejudicial! One example of this is the modern marathon. Almost 150 years ago, the first marathon was held during the Olympic games in athens. At that time, marathons were men-only races; women were not permitted to compete. However, these days, marathons are accessible for all: men, women, people with disabilities, and people of all different ages. In 1967, Kathrine Switzer ran the Boston Marathon, protesting the ban on female runners likewise Dick Traum became the first person with an amputation to compete when he ran in the 1976 New York City Marathon. These fundamental changes could only have been achieved by the actions of passionate people

Did you find five problems? If not, don't worry. Like writing itself, proofreading takes lots of practice. Here is the version that resulted from proofreading. Note the bold parts, which correspond to the changes outlined below:

*Many people agree on the fact that playing sports is good for the **human** body. Sports are fun, active ways to engage in teamwork and exercise. Yet, not everybody is included in most sports clubs, teams, and competitions. **This** can be considered prejudicial! One example of this is the modern marathon. Almost 150 years ago, the first marathon was held during the Olympic games in **Athens**. At that time, marathons were men-only races; women were not permitted to compete. However, these days, marathons are accessible for all: men, women, people with disabilities, and people of all different ages. In 1967, Kathrine Switzer ran the Boston Marathon, protesting the ban on female runners. **Likewise,** Dick Traum became the first person with an amputation to compete when he ran in the 1976 New York City Marathon. These fundamental changes could only have been achieved by the actions of passionate **people.***

In the first sentence, the writer misused the word "humane," so it was changed to "human," which is clearly the word that was intended. An unnecessary comma was removed after "this" to begin the fourth sentence. The writer also failed to capitalize the "a" in "Athens" in the fifth sentence. The eighth sentence was a run-on sentence, so it was split into two sentences in order to flow more smoothly and logically. Finally, the writer forgot to add a period after "people" in the final sentence.

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

In this lesson, you learned that **proofreading is** the final stage in the writing process when writers look for and correct errors in grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and formatting. **When and how to proofread** are ultimately up to the writer, but it is best to proofread after revising and editing has taken place, and to make sure you don't rely on spell-check programs alone. You also looked at an example of

proofreading in action to get a better sense of how this process works.

Best of luck in your learning!

 TERMS TO KNOW

Proofreading
The act of fixing errors in grammar, mechanics, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, commonly confused words, and formatting in an essay or other piece of writing.