

HBS Guide to Proofreading

Proofreading is the final step in the writing and editing process. In this step, a writer is looking for errors such as misspelled words, incorrect punctuation, stylistic inconsistencies, and formatting.

Proofreading should be done *after* the final editing of a document. Ideally, some time should elapse between editing and proofreading, so the reader returns to the document with fresh eyes. The key to proofreading is to read what is *on* the page, not what the writer *meant* to write.

Tips for Proofreading

- Print a copy of the document and proofread the paper copy.
- Read the document out loud.
- Read the document from the end to the beginning (sentence by sentence).
- Read slowly.
- Read for one type of error at a time.
- Use a ruler or paper to help focus on one line at a time.
- Use a spell and grammar check program (see the list below).
- Ask someone else to read your paper.

Common Errors to Look For

- Word choice confusion: their/they're/there; it's vs its; weather/whether; than/then
- Punctuation errors
 - Commas
 - Apostrophes
 - Hyphens, em and en dashes
 - Quotation marks
- Capitalization errors
- Verb errors
 - Subject-verb agreement
 - Wordy verb forms
 - Correct and consistent tenses
- Sentence structure errors
 - Sentence fragments
 - Comma splices
 - Fused & run-on sentences
- Pronoun errors
 - Agreement
 - Clear referents
- Consistent use of
 - Contractions

- Name/date/title style
 - Numbers
- Conciseness
 - Avoid cliches
 - Avoid wordy verb forms
 - Avoid redundancies
- Word Choice
 - Jargon
 - Vocabulary
 - Acronyms

Proofreading Programs & Extensions

- Add grammar or spelling extension to Google docs
- Add grammar and spelling checker by Ginger to Chrome
- Use Microsoft Editor in Word
 - Spelling
 - Grammar Checker
 - Read-Aloud
- Use a grammar and spell checker like Language Tool

Websites

- Ginger
- Grammarly
- PaperRater
- Typely
- Scribbr