

Proofreading Tips

G H S O N L i b r a r y

U p d a t e 1 0 / 2 2 / 2 0 0 9

Whether on the screen or printed on paper, read it out loud slowly. You will hear the words that you wrote rather than the words you meant to write.

Take a break between writing and proofreading, at least twenty minutes. Better yet, overnight. Proofread when you are most alert.

Spell check your writing, but don't depend on it. Read it backwards to focus on spelling.

Use a screen (a blank sheet of paper, envelope, ruler, etc.) to cover what you haven't read yet, allowing your eye to focus solely on one line at a time.

Use your finger as a pointer to read one word at a time.

Proofread the paper multiple times for multiple mistakes; once for spelling, once for grammar, once for skipped words, once for punctuation, etc.

Keep a list of your own individual errors and proofread to catch them. For example, if you tend to use exclamation points, proofread once to keep an eye out for them.

Besides the body of the paper, proofread the title page, headings, footers, pagination and margins.

Double check font variations; size, type, italics, bold.

Double check the spelling of all proper names.

Watch for over capitalization. Eliminate any that is unnecessary. Never capitalize all letters in one word, except acronyms.

Make sure all vertical lists are punctuated and indented consistently.

Do not use exclamation marks. Avoid using symbols within text (#, /, &, =).

Avoid, explain or define all acronyms and abbreviations. Also, avoid double acronym references, such as a GPS (Global Positioning System) system. Single letters may have an apostrophe, but apostrophes should be removed from plural acronyms, such as PCs.

Keep commas and periods inside quotation marks.

Make sure your format, spacing and paragraphs are consistent, page by page.

Verify internal references. Check all tables, figures, graphs, maps, calculations, etc. for accuracy. Make sure that text matches the figure it refers to.

Double check whenever you're sure something is right—"certainty is dangerous."

Have someone else proofread your paper by reading it aloud.

Editing Tips

G H S O N L i b r a r y

U p d a t e 1 0 / 2 2 / 2 0 0 9

As with proofreading, read your paper aloud. It may help to start with the last paragraph to be sure each paragraph stands on its own.

Sleep on it. Once you've finished writing your paper, walk away and edit it the next day when you're fresh and alert.

Cut, don't add. Editing should tighten your words and thoughts. Concise writing is much easier to read and helps get your point(s) across. Don't hesitate to "slash and burn."

Justify yourself. Everything you write should support the point(s) you are trying to make.

Use practical language. Avoid showy words and phrases. Eliminate elaborate language that confuses the reader. Avoid wordiness, jargon, slang and cliché's.

Avoid redundancy. While you may have learned to repeat yourself throughout your K-12 writing career, don't continue that pattern. Make your statement and move on. The "say it, say it again, and then say what you said" philosophy should no longer apply.

Eliminate unnecessary adjectives and adverbs that only pad the statement.

Watch for run on sentences. Sentences should average 15 to 20 words and paragraphs should average 6 to 10 lines.

Avoid passive verbs (to be, is, was, were, are, am). Use active verbs whenever possible.

Make sure paragraphs begin differently. They shouldn't all start with the same word.

Read to assure that your information flows logically.

Make sure that your verbs and subjects agree and that a consistent tense is used.

Avoid negative words. Replace them with positive ones.

Avoid, explain or define all acronyms and abbreviations. Also, avoid double acronym references, such as a GPS system. Single letters may have an apostrophe, but apostrophes should be removed from plural acronyms, such as PCs.

Keep commas and periods inside quotation marks.

When writing procedures, work through each step to make sure they are complete, accurate and in the right order.

Use "to" or "through" instead of a hyphen or dash for numeric ranges (1 to 5, chapters 2 through 20).

Do a grammar check, but don't depend on it.