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Proofreading your writing



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Introduction: Proofreading your work

Proofreading is an essential part of the writing process. It is the final step you need to take to ensure that you are **communicating your ideas clearly** and to ensure that you are **fulfilling the goals** of your writing.

It is more than merely a spell check. It should involve double-checking your work against any criteria you have, making sure your references are accurate, your analysis sound, and clarifying any remaining questions or limitations of your work.

This resource examines **what you need to look for**, and gives you an overview of some **techniques** you can use when proofreading your work.

What to look for

There are three main areas you should focus on when proofreading your work:

1 *FLOW*

Checking your structure, paragraphs, development of ideas and in-text citations

2 *CLARITY*

Checking for fluency, how well you've answered the question removing any ambiguity

3 *ACCURACY*

Checking your spelling, punctuation, grammar and referencing

What to look for: flow

Flow refers to how your work is structured, how well it reads and how coherent your ideas are.

These are some key questions you should ask about your work when checking for **flow**.



*is your argument
ordered in a logical
manner?*

Your ideas should be organised in a way that makes sense, and enables your reader to easily follow the flow of your argument.



*are your
paragraphs well
structured?*

Each paragraph should contain one main idea; you should begin a new paragraph for each new topic you write about.

What to look for: flow

are your paragraphs linked?

Each paragraph should begin with a sentence linking it to the previous paragraph to indicate how they relate to each other.

are your sentences complete?

You should ensure that your sentences are complete, meaning that they make sense when standing alone and they express a complete idea. You should also avoid using sentences that are too long.

is your introduction and conclusion sound?

Your introduction should include a concise statement of how you are going to answer the question. Your conclusion should include a final thought on your themes and analysis, as well as a statement about the implications or context of your ideas.

What to look for: clarity

Clarity refers to how easy your it is to understand your work, and how well you've answered the question

These are some key questions you should ask about your work when checking for **clarity**.



*have you made
any assumptions
that you haven't
explained?*

Are there any limitations or restrictions to your analysis that you haven't made explicit?



*is anything
unclear?*

Make sure your sentences are well structured to avoid any ambiguity in your meaning. You should also check that you haven't used any terminology or referred to any concepts that you haven't explained.

What to look for: clarity

*have you answered
all elements of the
question?*

Refer back to your assignment question to check that you've done what the task requires.

*are there any
unanswered
questions?*

Put yourself in your reader's shoes: are there any questions they might have about your analysis? Have you answered them?

What to look for: accuracy

Accuracy refers to whether there are any errors in your work. There are a lot of things that your spell checker won't pick up on!

These are some key things to look for when checking for **accuracy**.



have you made any typos?

Remember that your spell checker will only tell you if a word is a word, not if it's the right word. You should always check your work manually for any typos that may not be picked up by your spell checker. A common error is to accidentally mistype one or two keys, resulting in a different word from the one you intended, e.g. too/to, ratio/ration, desert/dessert.



is your writing consistent?

You should ensure that you've used a consistent voice and tone throughout your piece of work. Also check that you are consistent in your use of past or present tense.

What to look for: accuracy

are there any spelling mistakes?

If you're typing your work, there really is no excuse for misspelling anything. As well as running a spell check, you should check manually for things such as names, UK/US variations and commonly confused pairs of words such as practice/practise and affect/effect.

have you referenced accurately?

Failure to reference your work accurately can lead to lost marks, or even accusations of plagiarism.

have you used correct punctuation?

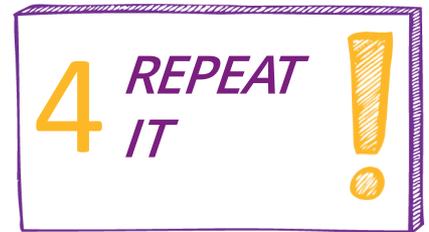
Punctuation exists to make writing easier to understand; punctuating your work inaccurately or sparsely can have the opposite effect, making it harder for your reader to follow your arguments.

How to do it

Proofreading is much more effective when it is not your own work that you're reading. If you can, it's a good idea to **exchange work with friends** to proofread each other's work.

When you've spent a lot of time on a piece of work, it can be difficult to spot errors; we often read what we **think** we've written, rather than what we've **actually** written.

In this section, we'll look at a number of techniques that you can use when proofreading to see your work with fresh eyes.



How to do it: leave it!

It's a good idea to leave some time after finishing a piece of work, coming back to it later to proofread it.

When writing a coursework assignment, this means you'll need to plan your time well to ensure you finish writing long enough before the submission deadline to leave time for proofreading.

In an exam situation, you may want to write your answer to all of the questions, then return to each one to proofread your answers. Again, this means you'll need to plan your time well to allow enough time for this.

How to do it: speak it!

Reading your work aloud is an excellent way to check that your writing is rhythmic and that it flows well.

You will notice areas where your sentences run on too long (you may even run out of breath!), or where they end abruptly.

It will also help you to pick up on areas in which you repeat yourself, or where you have redundancies in your word choice.

Obviously you won't be able to do this in an exam situation, but you can still subvocalise your work by sounding out your words in your head. This will still give you a good idea of how well your writing flows.

How to do it: change it!

If you're typing up an essay, changing the way that your document looks can help you to see it with fresher eyes.

Changing the font, colour and/or size is a quick and easy way to do this.

Printing it off is another good way of changing the way that you read your work.

How to do it: repeat it!

It's unlikely that you'll spot everything on your first check, so you'll need to do it a few times to get your work to the highest possible standard.

You may want to review your work in stages; do it once looking at flow, again for clarity, then do a final check for accuracy.

The process will be easier if you're only focusing on one thing at a time.

Summary

Proofreading is a key part of the writing process. It's the time you can take a step back and ask yourself with a critical eye whether you've communicated what you set out to say.

Don't forget, it's about your ideas and argument as much as spelling and grammar; it's important that you allow yourself this time to confirm that you're writing is clear enough for your reader to follow your argument.