OU Writing Center
The University of Oklahoma

6 Proofreading Tips

Use these suggestions to help you revise and polish your writing before you submit it. While all can be useful, some tips might be more helpful than others for different writers.

1. Learn your most common mistakes.

Do you tend to get confused with commas or apostrophes? Do you tend to forget that "alot" should actually be "a lot?" Is subject-verb agreement a challenge sometimes?

Knowing your personal error patterns is a part of becoming a stronger writer. Make a list of your most common mistakes to help you watch for them as your proofread and polish. To identify your common errors, review instructor feedback and/or visit the OU Writing Center.

2. Read each paragraph, beginning at the end.

Start at the beginning of your piece of writing and read paragraph by paragraph. Start at the last sentence of the paragraph, though, and read backward sentence by sentence.

This can feel awkward and strange at first, but it can help you remove yourself from the rhythm of work you've spent a lot of time with, making spotting mistakes easier.

3. Read for only one type of error at a time.

It's easy to miss things when you're looking for *everything*, especially as you're learning to be more purposeful and effective in your proofreading.

On your first pass, you might focus on sentence clarity. Other passes could look for grammar, punctuation use, or typos.

4. Read out loud (or have the computer read to you).

Reading aloud allows your ears to catch mistakes that your eye and mind can miss, especially after you've read over a document several times.

Your mind knows what you mean and will often impose that meaning on what you've written. Reading your work out loud slows your mind down and allows you to recognize errors you'd otherwise not see. Most word processors have a free read aloud function, too.

5. Take a break.

It's important to take a break between drafting and revising and the proofreading work that follows.

Taking time between stages of writing can make it easier to notice errors or issues you might miss when you work with a familiar text over a longer period of time. It also gives you time and space to think about your ideas away from the blinking cursor.

6. Take your time.

Read slowly and carefully. Speed allows you to finish more quickly, but it also sets you up to miss typos and other errors. Slow and steady lets you be more successful.

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