

Proofreading

Analyze proofreading activities

You know that mistakes in grammar, punctuation, and spelling will negatively impact your grade on school assignments. They have larger-world implications, as well. To see more of this in action, read the following blog post from Melissa Culbertson:

“Why Poor Grammar and Spelling Are Bad for Your Blog”

I know you’ve been told this before but I’ll say it again: proper grammar and spelling matter, even in the blogging world. If that’s a little short on the dramatics, then pretend that statement is in neon-flashing lights for extra emphasis.

Just to be clear, bad grammar and spelling is WAY different than using conversational style or slang. For example, while you may have gotten in trouble in school for starting a sentence with “and” or “but,” it’s NOT grammatically incorrect. It’s just informal.

When I’m talking about poor grammar and spelling what I mean is the clear-cut, no-way-this-is-right type of errors that crop up in blogs all over the web. Things like saying “their” when you mean “they’re” or spelling receive with the “i” before the “e.” Or my least favorite: using a random apostrophe in a word (like “Dog’s run.”)

So how can poor grammar and spelling hurt your blog’s likeability? Like this:

YOU SLOW DOWN YOUR READER

Think of each mistake like a speed bump. Each time a reader notices a grammar or spelling error in your post, it slows them down. It may be a small bump that makes them say – “oh she meant this” – and then move on. Or it may be a larger one and your reader has to re-read it just for your words to make sense. Either way, lots of errors means lots of speed bumps and your reader probably won’t take that “route” again.

YOU MUDDLE THE MEANING OF YOUR POST

Picture the most beautiful story you could tell. Now add in some bad grammar or misspelled words. Kinda loses its luster, right? Sure some stories are hard to ruin but a polished post sure sounds a heck of a lot better. With a post free of mistakes, you keep the reader’s focus on your overall story, not individual words that are incorrect.

Same goes for blog posts that *aren’t* based on a story. Say you’re writing a tutorial. Well, if it’s full of extra-long, run-on sentences, it may be harder to understand your tutorial.

YOU COULD MISS OUT ON BRAND OPPORTUNITIES

Most people who are looking to work with bloggers are in PR or Marketing. As a marketer myself, we're picky when it comes to writing. PR and marketing people want the brand they represent to have top-notch bloggers writing about them. This means you could get picked over if your blog posts are riddled with errors.

So, treat your blog like your resume. It IS your resume. (The only difference I'd argue is that an occasional mistake shouldn't dissuade a brand from working with you whereas a single mistake on a resume could get yours tossed into a "not interested" pile.)

SO WHAT'S THE FIX?

People on the Internet have short attention spans so the fewer grammar or misspellings you have, the more likely someone will enjoy that phenomenal blog post of yours.

The fix is simply to proofread your posts. If you're someone who knows grammar and spelling isn't your strong suit, then make it a point to work on improving those skills bit by bit. Yes, we all make mistakes but we can always improve too. And yes, I proofread this post like a gazillion times so I wouldn't endure the irony if I indeed made a mistake.

Why and How to Proofread

Why bother with proofreading?

Proofreading needs to be considered as an important stage in writing and editing processes.

Writing and revising focus on how to communicate the topic content most effectively while **proofreading** focuses on the mechanics of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. If you miss this stage or proofread too quickly, you will not notice critical errors that reduce the effectiveness of what you write.

Teachers often use these proofreading symbols when they mark papers. If you see the same ones show up on graded projects return to you, this will help you learn to anticipate and avoid your unique writing concerns. We normally repeat the same kinds of errors in everything we write.

What is the best way to go about proofreading?

Work with another student or family member in an editing role

Did you know that...

- It is much harder to spot mistakes in your own writing than in someone else's work.
- Someone with a fresh set of eyes might offer excellent suggestions for improvement.
- Professional writers hire editors who proofread each page up to ten times and pick up new errors each time.

- Publishers use teams of editors who work in pairs, reading out loud to each other in order to spot errors.

Know your typical errors

If you know you often make certain errors, double check for these in particular.

Make a note of your errors each time you get work marked and look for patterns. For example misspellingss, keyboarding letters bcak ot frotn, missing words because your brain works far faster you can write type. Did you spot all those kinds of errors in the previous sentence?

Read aloud, word for word

Take advantage of the dual power of sight and hearing working together and you may hear a mistake that you can't see, such as an omitted or repeated word. Also, note that wherever you pause, you often need some punctuation.

Slow down to about 25% of your normal reading speed

This will help you to read what is actually on the page, not what you think is there. When you read what you wrote, because you already know what is there, it is harder to concentrate on each word.

When you read at normal speed, you “fix your eyes” on the page only three or four times per line, or less. You unconsciously predict the words between these points and often pick out only as much of the words as you need to do this—perhaps only as much as the first and last letters.

To proofread effectively, you need to focus consciously on every word you have written and maybe do it twice in longer words. You have to look attentively at each word, not slide over it.

Check for consistency and accuracy

- Check through all the verbs to make sure tenses are consistent (all match in time sequence)
- Ask who?/what? for each verb to make sure singular/plural subjects match with verbs. Check every sentence has a full stop (for example, did you notice that the line above this one needed a full stop at the end?).

Some bits of your writing need to be double checked, such as the accuracy of statistics, dates, page references, or quotations you have copied, to make sure that the evidence you have selected is absolutely correct. This may mean re-reading sections of your sources again.

Read from the end

Instead of starting at the beginning of your page, start with the very last sentence and read that on its own, then read each sentence individually, working back towards the beginning, a sentence at a time.

This will stop you sliding over the words and help you see if you have complete sentences or fragments and run-on sentences. It will also help you see if you have pronouns (like *it* or *this*) that do not have full meaning because they are too far from their corresponding noun.

Read for formality

Look through your writing for symptoms that your text is not formal enough. You can do this easily using the ***Find and Replace*** tool in Microsoft Word and searching for apostrophes in words like *it's*, *they're*, *you're*, *can't*. These contractions need to be replaced by the full words to be formal enough for an academic essay or report.

Then search for the capital *I* because first person may not be appropriate and might need to be replaced by the passive or third person (“Results from this experiment show that...” instead of “I did an experiment that shows...”).

Turn on the Grammar tools in Word

As well as having a spellchecker that underlines wrong spelling with a red dotted line, Microsoft Word can identify problems with sentence structure by underlining with a green dotted line if you have the grammar tools turned on.

Check your reference list

Check through your reference list systematically for alphabetical order and for all required commas, full stops, parentheses, and for missing details such as place or publisher or date that you accessed a website.

Finally, try some [Read-aloud software \(Links to an external site.\)](#) to help with proofreading. If the word or structure is wrong in some way, the text reader will read it wrongly and you will immediately see what you need to fix. Of course, this will not identify differences between words that sound exactly the same, such as *there/their/they're* or *weather/whether*.

Approaching Precision

Proofreading can be seen as a tedious task that many writers avoid like a contagious disease. Sometimes, writers will simply lump several stages of the writing process into one, calling it all “proofreading the document.” Careful proofreading, however, is the equivalent of combing one’s hair, straightening one’s clothing, and buffing one’s shoes before facing the public. It is possible to enter the public in an unkempt manner, but the effect upon the public might not be what one expects or prefers.

If the other writing process steps have been performed adequately, then much of the proofreading stage will be routine and limited to the few mistakes that have escaped the writer's attention during the multiple drafting, revising, and editing stages.

What Proofreading Entails

Proofreading involves checking for grammatical, spelling, and mechanical errors, which may include problems with verb tense, subject-verb agreement, parallel structure, sentence completion, alternate spellings, capitalization, and punctuation. Proofreading is often made easier by the use of colored ink, bracketed or parenthetical notations, or proofreading symbols for identification and correction.

Example

The Strange Life of Death

Death in literature has experienced a strange life throughout the years. In some cases, death **have** **has** been portrayed as a welcome **visitor** **guest** whose presence is unwittingly included among family and friends (e.g., “The Ambitious Guest,” a short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne). On other occasions, death has been ostracized as an enemy whose unwelcome morbid presence is forbidden or unsuccessfully avoided (e.g., Oedipus). The only consistent certainty about death **have** **has** been **their** **the** controlling inevitability with which death has been portrayed.

Subject-verb agreement errors should be checked in every independent and dependent clause. So too should parallel structure of words, phrases, and ideas. Detection of spelling or grammatical and mechanical errors should not be left to the electronic red or green colors of spell and grammar check: Electronic spell checks notoriously overlook homonyms—or erroneously insert them in place of other misspelled words. Such errors can only be found by the human eye.

Similar mistakes can occur with computer recommendations in grammar. Humans should not abdicate the task of reasoning and applying knowledge to a computer's artificial intelligence. As the astronauts learned in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, that artificial intelligence can come to some flawed conclusions.

Fresh Eyes

Many writers find that they benefit from leaving a distance of time—and even place—between the most recent draft and the final proofreading stage before publication. These writers find that approaching a text with fresh eyes makes them better able to detect errors that might escape the attention of one who has spent a great deal of uninterrupted time with the document.

Writers who don't have the luxury of waiting between completing a draft and proofreading it can still benefit from that fresh perspective by asking someone who hasn't seen the document to proofread it. A word of caution is in order here, however: A writer would be wise to avoid asking the same person to proofread all of the writer's documents, for fear of becoming too imposing.

No matter how proofreading is accomplished, it should be performed in a careful, methodical manner so that the document's overall appearance is worthy of the writer's professional and personal pride in the process and the product.