

Proofreading Strategies for Common Errors



Proofreading Strategies

Most writers think that proofreading is a fairly straightforward process, but in fact, to find and correct all errors in a paper usually requires exact and careful attention to detail and involves a thorough and careful reading of the entire paper line by line and word for word. Papers that have undergone diligent sentence-level proofreading are viewed more favorably by readers/ graders than those that appear not to have been proofread.

Questions about Your Proofreading Process

- What are the benefits and problems with using the computer to proofread for grammar and vocabulary problems?
- How much do you rely on the computer's grammar checker and thesaurus?
- What other tools do you use when you proofread (i.e., dictionary, grammar book, thesaurus)?
- Do you have a process for proofreading your papers for grammar and vocabulary? If you are bilingual, is your proofreading process the same in your first language and in English?
- How much time do you devote to proofreading or editing your papers for grammar and vocabulary?

Proofreading Strategies to Try Off the Computer:

- o Read backwards from the last sentence to the first sentence of each paragraph. This will force your attention away from the content
- o Read multiple times, looking only for one kind of grammar problem each time. For example, you could read the first time to find problems with *a & the*. You could read a second time, looking for problems with *verb tense*. (See attached chart outlining editing suggestions for common grammar problems).
- o Finish early so that you can put your paper aside for several hours or a day before editing.
- o Read out loud, slowly. Move your pencil over each word to ensure that all the words that you intended to write are actually written.
- o Read your paper out loud to a partner. This time, the partner has a pencil and notes whenever something seems problematic.
- o Be very suspicious—if you aren't sure it's right, look it up.

Proofreading Strategies to Try On the Computer:

- o Mark your paper in some way so that your grammar choices stand out. Enlarge the font. Put // between each sentence. Underline or highlight all verbs. Break each paragraph into individual sentences and pretend each sentence is on the SAT grammar test.

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Editing Category	Nature of the problem	Sample of the Problem	Self-Editing Advice
Verb Tense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wrong verb tense for sentence context - Shifting verb tense without signaling the reader 	<p><i>Ex. On the 25th of February in 1965, five landing tanks are floating on the South China Sea toward Saigon, Vietnam. The first overseas action of Korean troops started. Korean troops were first sent to Vietnam at that time. And a total of 340,000 troops had been sent in turn until 1973.</i></p>	<p>Highlight all the verbs that are marked for tense, using a different color highlighter for each verb tense.</p> <p>When the color changes, check that you have signaled this shift to your reader. If you have not, you cannot switch from present to past tense verbs.</p>
Verb Form	<p>No –ed at the end of verbs that follow the auxiliary “be” “become” or “get” (i.e., be involved)</p> <p>Other problems with form of verbs</p>	<p><i>Ex. Students who are admit to a university like UCLA or Berkeley are consider more intelligent than other students.</i></p> <p><i>Ex. -- The nature is fragile and must protect from the pollution.</i></p>	<p>Using a highlighter or a colored pen, underline or highlight all two-part or three-part verbs (e.g., <i>have done; is doing; are attributed to; would have done</i>).</p> <p>Make sure that the auxiliary is correct (have vs. be) and that the participle is in the correct form.</p>
Subject-Verb Agreement	<p>The verb in present tense does not agree with its subject</p>	<p><i>Ex. -- The research of Professor Roy Walford and some other scientists have not yielded a definite conclusion.</i></p>	<p>Look for sentences in which the main verb comes 6 or 7 words from the beginning of the sentence. Underline that verb & then draw an arrow back to the subject of that verb.</p> <p>Also, look for sentences in which the verb is separated from its subject by the word “that” or “who”. Make sure the subject agrees with the verb.</p>
Articles/ Noun Forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Missing article/incorrect choice (<i>the</i> signals specific reference; <i>a/an</i> must precede any noun that is countable; no article + 	<p><i>Ex. -- We must protect the nature from pollution.</i></p>	<p>Look for nouns that are not preceded by “a”, “the”, “this”, “these” or another determiner AND that are not plural.</p> <p>Ask yourself, “Is the noun here</p>

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	<p>plural noun refers to the noun, in general) - The noun cannot be plural or must be plural</p>		<p>uncountable?” If not, you must make it plural or put some kind of determiner in front of it.</p> <p>Look for nouns that you have modified with “the”. Ask yourself, “Is this noun definite?” or “Does the reader know which noun I’m talking about?”</p> <p>Another way to check the use of “the” is to ask yourself if the sentence is a generalization or if it is specific.</p>
<p>Wrong Pronoun or Determiner Reference</p>	<p>- use of “it” when the noun referred to is plural - use of “they” when the noun referred to is singular - unclear pronoun reference – use of “this” or “these” or “it” where the part of the sentence being referred to is unclear</p>	<p><i>Ex. The law prevents possible accidents before it actually happens.</i></p>	<p>Look for “it” or “they” or “this” or “these”. Draw an arrow from the pronoun to the antecedent (i.e., the specific noun this word is referring to).</p> <p>Make sure that the antecedent matches the pronoun or determiner in number.</p> <p>Also, the pronoun “it” can only refer to a specific noun, not to a whole sentence or an entire idea.</p>
<p>Wrong Preposition</p>	<p>- over use of the preposition “of” or “by” - the noun or verb or adjective is usually followed by a different preposition than the one you have chosen</p>	<p><i>Ex. Chris Gardner lost all of his family’s life savings by investing <u>on</u> bone-density scanners</i></p>	<p>Look for overuse of “of”</p> <p>If they are followed by a preposition, make sure verbs in passive form (be + verb –ed) are followed by the preposition “by”</p>