

PROOFREADING TIPS AND RESOURCES

Proofreading Tips

Before You Proofread

- **Be sure you've revised the larger aspects of your text.** Don't make corrections at the sentence and word level if you still need to work on the focus, organization, and development of the whole paper, of sections, or of paragraphs.
- **Set your text aside for a while** (15 minutes, a day, a week) between writing and proofing. Some distance from the text will help you see mistakes more easily.
- **Eliminate unnecessary words** before looking for mistakes – remove wordy, passive, & vague language for concise and direct sentences.
- **Know what to look for.** Based on the comments of your professors or writing center consultants on past papers, make a list of mistakes you need to watch for.
- **Find a proofreading buddy.** Make plans to exchange work with a peer (roommate, classmate, etc.).

When You Proofread

- **Work from a printout if possible, not the computer screen.** (But see below for computer functions that can help you find some kinds of mistakes.)
- **Read aloud.** This is especially helpful for spotting run-on sentences, but you'll also hear other problems that you may not see when reading silently.
- **Use a blank sheet of paper to cover up the lines below the one you're reading.** This technique keeps you from skipping ahead of possible mistakes.
- **Use the search function of the computer to find mistakes you're likely to make.** Search for “it,” for instance, if you confuse “its” and “it's”; for “-ing” if dangling modifiers are a problem; for opening parentheses or quote marks if you tend to leave out the closing ones.
- **If you tend to make many mistakes, check separately for each kind of error,** moving from the most to the least important, and following whatever technique works best for you to identify that kind of mistake.
- **Read backwards,** word by word or sentence by sentence.
- **End with a spelling check, using a computer spelling checker.** Remember that a spelling checker won't catch mistakes with homonyms (e.g., “they're,” “their,” “there”) or certain typos (like “he” for “the”).

Proofreading Resources

Recommended Online Resources

- Purdue University's *Online Writing Lab (OWL)*: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html
The Purdue OWL provides up-to-date writing rules, tips, and guides not just for proofreading and writing but for research and citation styles too. An entire section of the site is also dedicated to ESL writing help.

Recommended Print Resources*

- Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers. *A Writer's Reference*
- William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*
- Matthew Parfitt. *Writing in Response*
- (for Graduate Writing) Eric Hayot. *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities*

*Use the most recent editions you can find

Credit: Adapted from University of Wisconsin (<https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/Proofreading.html>) & the Purdue University OWL, 2020.

The Brandeis University Writing Program, including the Writing Center, First-Year Writing, and Writing in the Majors, offers support for writing throughout the community, including undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and staff.

For more information, see www.brandeis.edu/UWP or write to UWP@brandeis.edu.