

First Proofreading Workshop
Six Things to Review Before You Submit Your Paper
First-Year Writing Program
Montclair State University

How to Proofread:

Proofreading requires re-reading. You need to read each and every sentence you have written to make sure you have not made careless errors. Careless errors are more common than you might imagine!

The most effective way to proofread is to start at the end of your essay and read one sentence at a time, all the way to the beginning. Use a blank piece of paper to guide your reading, to make sure you read just one sentence at a time.

Reading aloud also helps you catch errors.

Here are some common and easy-to-catch errors to attend to while you are re-reading your essay:

1. Titles. Have you given your essay a title? A title might suggest to readers the issue you're addressing, and it definitely should interest readers! "Introduction" is not a great title, nor is re-typing the name of the unit. A title should always be centered, but not underlined, put in quotes, or otherwise highlighted. The first letter of each major word should be capitalized. Incorrect: "My best year in high school". Correct:

My Best Year in High School

2. Numbers. Spell out numbers of one or two words or those that begin a sentence. For example, "I have 12 cards" is wrong. "I have twelve cards" is right. "150 kids got on the bus" is wrong. "One hundred fifty kids got on the bus" is correct.

3. Extra words. As you re-read your essay for the final time, look to cut any phrases or words that are filler. For example, the phrase "In conclusion," is unnecessary. Readers can tell you are concluding without being told. Also, "In my opinion" is unnecessary as readers can also tell that you are stating an opinion. Other examples include: "I think that," and "it seems that." Never write "I feel," unless you are talking about an emotion, as in "I felt angry." Using "feel" in place of "think" is just wrong.

4. Talking words. Be careful about using talking words like, "well," "so," "then." "So" and "then" can be used to move action along, but when you use any of these three words just to warm up, you're using them unnecessarily. For example, "So, my family has always been proud to be Italian-Americans" the "so" is unnecessary. Similarly, in "Well, so then we all got back into the car and returned to Montclair" both "so" and "then" are unnecessary.

5. Words that sound the same, but have different meanings (homonyms). If you have a tendency to confuse words that have the same sound but are spelled differently, you should read your essay one time only to look at these problems. It's a kind of writing problem that some people make all the time, and others seldom do. Go through your paper and circle every time you use to/too/two, their/there, where/we're, your/you're, its/it's, whose/who's except/accept. After you have circled these words, check in a dictionary or grammar book to make sure you know what these words mean. Once you are clear on the

meaning of these words, check over each time you have used the problematic word to make sure you have spelled it correctly.

6. Introducing secondary sources. Discussing essays you read for class. Include the writer's full name the first time you introduce his/her work. For example, "In Oliver Sacks' essay, "Rebecca," we learn about a girl who is both retarded and poetic." When you refer to the writer again in your paper, just use her/his last name. For example, "Sacks' argument is that we tend to see people primarily in terms of their deficiencies."

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