

Strategies for Proofreading

Proofreading is the last stage of the writing process to occur before you submit your work. Writers need to make sure that their writing is clear and easily readable. There are a number of technical tips and strategies to help writers proofread effectively. These methods help you focus on sentence-level concerns.

- ✓ **Read your paper aloud.** This method is great for finding omitted words or awkward sentences.
- ✓ **Set your paper aside.** Taking a day away from the paper can give you a new outlook on grammar and clarity, as well as overall organization.
- ✓ **Use a ruler.** Cover your paper so that you focus on only one line at a time. This helps locate specific error patterns and prevents you from reading ahead and anticipating what you "meant to say" but did not actually say.
- ✓ **Read the paper backwards.** This method is great for finding punctuation and other grammar errors. Like using a ruler, it also prevents you from reading ahead and anticipating what you "meant to say" but did not actually say.
- ✓ **Read for error patterns.** If you are aware of what your typical errors are, you should read for them specifically and one at a time. For example, if you are using this method to look for subject-verb agreement, you should not also look for passive voice.
- ✓ **Read for spelling errors.** Don't rely on spell / grammar checkers alone. There are some errors they cannot catch. For instance, proper nouns and discipline-specific terminology are not always in the checkers' dictionaries--you'll have to check them yourself. Similarly, the checker cannot tell you the difference between misused but correctly-spelled words (such as to/too/two or whether/weather) or typos that accidentally create another word (such as possess/posses).

Adapted from Jan Madraso. "Proofreading: the Skill We've Neglected to Teach." English Journal 82.1 (1993), 32-41.

Original version of this handout drafted by Lynnette Deem