

Top Tips for Proofreading

Proofreading is the final checking process for any document or text. It used to be done on paper hard copies, using those peculiar symbols and marking in the margin. Nowadays it's more likely to be done on screen. Follow the following tips to help you become a fast and reliable proofreader.

- 1. Proofreading is not the same as editing.** It's supposed to be a final process before publication, in whatever medium. If it needs more than minor changes, send it back to its author or editor.
- 2. Focus on each word.** Normally you read for meaning. With proofreading you have to read a text word by word. Try reading something backwards, so that you focus on each word rather than the meaning of the sentence.
- 3. Try not to proofread your own work.** It's much harder to spot errors in something you have written or edited.
- 4. If proofreading on screen, use 'track changes'** so that any changes you're not sure about can be undone easily.
- 5. Take frequent breaks.** Even really experienced proofreaders become less efficient the longer they work. It requires a level of concentration that can be quite tiring.
- 6. Check facts, figures and people's names.** You need to check not only that spelling and grammar are correct, but also that facts and figures (such as phone numbers) are correct too. People's surnames are a particular bugbear; double-check them and make sure they have been spelled the same every time they're used.
7. If your document is not too long, **you could try printing it out and reading it on paper.** Not great for the environment, but many people find it much easier to pick up errors on paper.
- 8. Get yourself a really good dictionary.** The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors, commonly known as ODWE, is also a great help, and the main broadsheet newspapers have useful online style guides. If you read a lot of documents with similar terminology and language, compile a list of common words and style points so that you don't have to keep looking the same things up.
- 9. Do it in stages.** Go through the document several times, perhaps checking spelling the first time, punctuation the next, word order on the next pass and looking up facts and figures on the final run. Trained proofreaders can look for everything at once, but this approach is more fail-safe for those new to proofreading.
- 10. Check everything on the page.** It's not just the words that you need to check. Footers, headers, page numbers, captions all need to be correct.