

## Proofreading

Proofreading is a critical step in writing that many students mistakenly assume is optional. While tools and resources for proofreading have improved over the years, the task of proofreading can seem monumental. This handout will include tips, tricks, and resources to help you proofread effectively and efficiently.

### What is Proofreading?

Proofreading is not the same as reading. When you read, the goal is to understand the information presented. You may not be preoccupied with grammatical features such as verb tenses or subject-verb agreement. However, when you proofread, you want to assume that every space, letter, word, and punctuation mark could potentially contain a mistake. Your goal is to find and fix errors in the text. The following sections will contain tips to help you identify and correct these issues.

### Preparing to Proofread

Successful proofreading does not begin the moment your eyes start combing through your sentences. Successful proofreading begins before you start reading your paper: the setting you proofread in and the duration of time you give yourself are both essential to your success.

#### *Recognize that We All Make Mistakes*

A major element of proofreading is mental work. Many students quickly find themselves frustrated or demoralized when reviewing their work. Allow yourself grace and understanding when finding and fixing these errors—mistakes are natural and happen to everyone. Getting angry with yourself is both harmful and counterproductive.

If you have been staring at the same assignment for several hours, days, weeks, or even months, it may help you to stand up, rest your eyes, do some light exercise, eat a healthy snack, and drink water before attempting to proofread your work.

#### *Read Your Work Aloud*

Silent reading is easy and comfortable, but the human brain is skilled at automatically evening out errors in a text or inserting missing words. When you read out loud, the addition of sound engages your brain differently, forcing you to stick to the text as it is written. If you find yourself stumbling on a sentence or sensing a lack of punctuation, it may be a sign that something needs to be corrected. The sense that something is wrong is a good place to start looking for fixes, even if you are unsure of what exactly needs to be fixed. Feel free to consult further [Homegrown Handouts](#) for more specific advice on punctuation, spelling, and grammar conventions.

If you recognize there is an error but cannot figure out what is wrong, even after research, mark it with a comment, contrasting highlight, or underline. This step will help you remember to bring it up to a peer or tutor later.

### ***Change Your Font or Font Size***

If you are having trouble reading one line, or if you find yourself skipping words, try enlarging the font size of the sentence you are reviewing. Alternatively, switch the font of your text to a wider font like Comic Sans or OpenDyslexic. This will help you keep your place as you read and prevent skipping.

### ***Get a Second Opinion***

Letting another person read your work is an easy and straightforward way to get a fresh set of eyes looking for mistakes or misspelled words. Some professors assign peer reviews on certain papers and assignments, so make sure to take advantage of constructive feedback you receive from your peers.

Tutoring services offered through your school can also help you. Classes sometimes have tutoring services offered by peers who specialize in the topic. If you do not have time to schedule a formal appointment, the SJSU Writing Center and other tutoring services offer drop-in sessions that can address minor concerns related to grammar and word choice.

### **Proofreading AI Tools**

Proofreading AI tools like Grammarly, ProWritingAid, and Quillbot are accessible, easy to use, and generally accepted by most institutions. These tools analyze your writing through pattern recognition to find areas where you may have made errors in grammar or punctuation. You probably use at least one of these tools in the form of a browser extension while writing online.

However, it is important to note that these tools can and do make mistakes. They rely on analyzing previous samples of writing for context when suggesting fixes, and these samples are then compared to your written content. If there are too many errors or inconsistencies in your work before a tool attempts to fix it, you may find yourself accepting suggestion after suggestion that changes all your verbs to the wrong tense, inserts incorrect punctuation, or tries to reword sentences in ways that don't make sense.

These tools cannot fully replace the human element in proofreading. No matter what you use to proofread, you are still in control of your work, and you are responsible for the final product. Make sure to remain mindful of what these tools are doing to your draft, and do not be afraid to reject suggestions that do not make sense. Think critically about all the suggested revisions.

### **Summary**

While there is no “one size fits all” approach to proofreading, one or most of the strategies above can help you become a fast and efficient proofreader. Remember, the point of proofreading is not to accomplish the task in as little time as possible; the point is to improve your writing. To this end, give yourself time to proofread your work and make as few mistakes as possible.

## Activity: Proofreading Practice

The following examples have been stacked with common proofreading errors. Find and correct the errors using any combination of the strategies explained above. If your outcome does not look exactly like the answer key, do not worry! Your writing style may simply be different, and answers will vary.

### Example 1

Nature is a beautiful thing that we can seeing everyday if we just looked more careful. The trees are like the lungs of the earth, they breath air for us to breath also. Animals like deer's and birds chirps in the morning to tells us a new day is begining. But some peoples are not appreciate it, they litter and cutting trees down for building. It makes me sad because we must save the nature for future generation who maybe not even have trees to see. If everyone does their part, the world will be more better and happy for all.

### Example 2

The ocean is so big and blue, it stretches far as the eyes can seen. Fishs swim in it, and they is all diffrent colors and shapes, like a rainbow underwater. Some peoples throws trash in the ocean, which is bad because turtles can think plastic is food and eat it, then they gets sick. Waves crashes on the beach, and sand sticks to your feets when you walks there. The ocean smells salty, but it's peaceful to sit and listen. We should all protects it better, because the ocean is what makes the world look pretty and helps all liveing things.

## Answer Key

### Example 1

Nature is a beautiful thing that we can see every day if we look more carefully. The trees are like the lungs of the earth; they breathe air for us. Birds chirp in the morning to tell us a new day is beginning. But some people do not appreciate it— they litter and cut trees down. It makes me sad because we must save nature for future generations who may not even have trees to see. If everyone does their part, the world will be better for all.

### Example 2

The ocean stretches as far as the eyes can see. Fish of all different colors and shapes swim in the ocean, like a rainbow underwater. Waves crash on the beach, and sand sticks to your feet when you walk there. The ocean smells salty, but it's peaceful to sit next to and listen. However, some people throw trash in the ocean, which is bad because turtles can think plastic is food and eat it, which makes them sick. We should all protect it better because the ocean helps all living things and makes the world look pretty.