

# Powerful Proofreading Skills

## Getting Started

- ✓ Determine when you are “at your best” or most alert. You’ll do a better job proofreading and catching errors.
- ✓ Remove as many distractions as you can. If possible, close your door, forward your calls, and clear other projects from your desk. The more you can concentrate on just proofreading, the more success you’ll have.
- ✓ Keep all important reference material within arm’s reach. Don’t keep getting up and down to gather resources. A dictionary and a thesaurus are a must!
- ✓ Before you begin, know all timelines, due dates, and deadlines. This will help you plan and budget your time well and prevent the rush of proofreading a document at the last minute.

## Proofreading “musts”

- ✓ Accuracy is your top priority—speed must come second (even when you’re in a hurry!).
- ✓ Plan to proofread each document at least three times. It may sound like a lot, but you’ll catch all the errors and avoid costly corrections.
- ✓ When you proofread numbers, read aloud—digit by digit.
- ✓ Place a straightedge (ruler, piece of paper) below the line you are reading to avoid skipping words or lines of text.
- ✓ Distance yourself from the document you just composed. It is common to miss mistakes in work you just produced. Whenever possible, put time between the writing and the proofreading stages. When you return to correct your work, you’ll be more objective.
- ✓ Double-space documents in draft form for easy proofreading.

## Read the document Backward

- ✓ Reading material from right to left or from the bottom of the page to the top forces you to look at individual words.
- ✓ Reading backwards helps when you are checking details such as spelling; however, it is not effective for checking content accuracy.

## Identify errors “Hot Spots”

Proofreading errors are found often:

- ✓ Near the beginning or ending of a line
- ✓ In proper nouns
- ✓ In long words
- ✓ Near the bottom of the page
- ✓ In number combinations
- ✓ In titles and headings
- ✓ In names

## Watch for the following errors:

- ✓ Double small words (if, in , as, by, be)
- ✓ Omission of one of a pair doubled letters (omitted)
- ✓ Substitution of one small word for another (an for on, in for on, by for be)
- ✓ Transposition of words within sentences
- ✓ Transposition of letters within words
- ✓ Omission of a closing quotation mark, bracket, or parenthesis
- ✓ Words such as *if*, *in*, *is*, and *it* left out when the preceding word ends with the same letter or the next word begins with it.
- ✓ Confusion of suffixes (for example, typed/types, former/formed)

## Proofreading from a computer screen

- ✓ When proofreading on-screen, slowly scroll your document down line by line on the first reading. Or use a straightedge against the screen to prevent your eyes from darting.
- ✓ When proofreading hard copy produced on a word processor, keep your screen and hard copy at the same place in the document. Corrections and updates will be easier and faster.
- ✓ Hold the original next to the computer screen and use comparison methods of proofreading.
- ✓ When proofreading on-screen enlarge the type you are reading. Errors are more likely to stand out in a larger type font.
- ✓ Be sure to use a spell-checker and grammar checker to verify the accuracy of your writing. **However, neither of these programs can take the place of proofreading.**
- ✓ To increase accuracy, print a double-spaced copy of the on-screen text, and proofread from the printout. It's easier on your eyes, and you will be less distracted.

Taken from:

Smith, Debra A. and Helen R. Sutton. *Powerful Proofreading Skills*. Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publications. 1994.