

Give Your Writing a Tune-up with These Proofreading and Revising Techniques

Handout for Students

Number 1: Lie to Yourself. Use Google calendar or another tool to create an earlier/“false” deadline for yourself, and stick to it. If you aren’t sticking to it, ask yourself, “how important is this to me?” This will give you the window you need to proof and revise your work and make it close to perfect as possible.

Number 2: Take a break. The next tip is to step back ... way back from your paper. This way, it doesn’t seem so familiar, and you don’t “fill in” missing items by imagining they are there.

Number 3: Change the look. Change the font, the size of the font (make it really large), the line spacing, or the font color, all these can trick your brain into thinking it’s seeing an unfamiliar document; separate the text into individual sentences.

Number 4: Print it. Print the paper out, grab your trusty red pen, sit in a comfy spot and read it critically, harshly, and mark up anything and everything that is out of place ... look for the smallest errors.

Number 5: Prove yourself wrong. Let go of your writer persona and become a proofreader. Instead of the *defensive* writer become the *offensive* proofreader. And rather than reading to “prove” you’ve done a good job, try reading for the express purpose of proving you haven’t ... of finding something, anything, even the smallest possible thing, wrong with it. And reward yourself for finding it.

Number 6: Do 5-6 Separate Read Throughs. Each time you go through a manuscript, focus on a different element of it. So go through your paper each time looking for a different element. Keep track of your search by writing on the first page what search you are currently on, and then check it off when you’re done.

- Circle every punctuation mark.
- Pay attention to apostrophes.
- Look for extra or missing blank lines.
- Look for font changes in the wrong places, like wrong size, bold, or italic fonts.
- Check for extra spaces at the ends of lines or ending punctuation and extra spaces between words (there should be just one space).

Number 7: Read out loud. Reading slowly and out loud forces you to say each word and also lets you hear how the words sound together.

Number 8: Read your paper backwards. Start at the end and read it backwards. Start with the last word on the last page and work your way back to the beginning, reading each word separately. Read backwards, sentence by sentence to check grammar; this will help you avoid becoming distracted by the content.

Number 9: Keep your reference books close by. Proofreading is a learning process. Keep them close at hand as you proofread. Then mark your books to remind you of areas where you have consistent questions or issues.

Number 10: Create your own proofreading checklist. Keep a list of the types of mistakes you commonly make, and then refer to that list each time you proofread.