

Style and Editing

How to Proofread

BEFORE YOU PROOFREAD

- 🕒 **Be sure you've revised the larger aspects of your text.** Don't make corrections at the sentence and word level if you still need to work on the focus, organization, and development of the whole paper, of sections, or of paragraphs.
- 🕒 **Set your text aside for a while (15 minutes, a day, a week) between writing and proofing.** Some distance from the text will help you see mistakes more easily.
- 🕒 **Eliminate unnecessary words before looking for mistakes.**
- 🕒 **Know what to look for.** From the comments of your professors and TAs on past papers, make a list of mistakes you need to watch for.

WHEN YOU PROOFREAD

- 🕒 **Work from a printout, not the computer screen.** (But see below for computer functions that can help you find some kinds of mistakes.)
- 🕒 **Read out loud.** This is especially helpful for spotting run-on sentences, but you'll also hear other problems that you may not see when reading silently.
- 🕒 **Use a blank sheet of paper to cover up the lines below the one you're reading.** This technique keeps you from skipping ahead of possible mistakes.
- 🕒 **Use the search function of the computer to find mistakes you're likely to make.** Search for "it," for instance, if you confuse "its" and "it's;" for "-ing" if dangling modifiers are a problem; for opening parentheses or quote marks if you tend to leave out the closing ones.
- 🕒 **If you tend to make many mistakes, check separately for each kind of error, moving from the most to the least important, and following whatever technique works best for you to identify that kind of mistake.** For instance, read through once (backwards, sentence by sentence) to check for fragments; read through again (forward) to be sure subjects and verbs agree, and again (perhaps using a computer search for "this," "it," and "they") to trace pronouns to antecedents.
- 🕒 **End with a spelling check, using a computer spelling checker or reading backwards word by word.** But remember that a spelling checker won't catch mistakes with homonyms (e.g., "they're," "their," "there") or certain typos (like "he" for "the").

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