



The Art of Proofreading

There are three stages of proofreading:

1. Revising / rewriting proofreading: This is a major reworking of the paper that involves rearranging the order of paragraphs, cutting material, adding new paragraphs and sections, and so on.

2. Editing proofreading: This involves working primarily with sentences: rephrasing and clarifying sentences, verifying consistency, and correcting grammatical and mechanical mistakes.

3. Format proofreading: This involves checking for a correct and consistent format in the document. Scan the edges of the document and look for anything that sticks out and doesn't look right. Then look at the overall page: Is the text consistently justified or consistently left aligned? Now scan the document and pay attention to the spaces instead of the words. Take out any extra spaces you find within the text. Finally, check page numbers and footnotes, if applicable.

Give yourself ample time to go through each of these stages of proofreading for the cleanest, most professional document. Break down your tasks to prevent feeling overwhelmed.

Tips to help you proofread more accurately:

- Make sure you have followed the assignment.
- Re-read the paper and locate your thesis statement (main point). Write this or a possible thesis on another piece of paper. On the same sheet, write down what you want this paper to do, specifically what you want the reader to think or feel while reading the paper, or what you're trying to show in the paper. This statement of purpose probably won't appear in your paper; you're only writing it down to keep it in mind as you make some choices.
- Next, determine the central idea of each paragraph: *What does the paragraph say? What does the paragraph do?* Be specific as possible.
- Make sure each of these "paragraph ideas" clearly connect to your thesis. If they do not, decide if you should re-write the thesis or eliminate the paragraph. Does the paragraph order allow a new reader to follow your development, or might another order work better? Are ideas repeated frequently? Should some be eliminated?

- To improve the “flow” of your paper, make the transitions more explicit, create new transitions where none existed; and re-arrange the order of your paragraphs to make a transition possible.
- Always proof from a printed copy of your paper. Do not try to proof a document from your computer screen. You could miss many errors this way.
- Be clear and specific about your corrections; do not simply circle the errors.
- When possible, ask someone else to proofread your work. Because you know what you mean to say, you may skim over errors. Everyone has different strengths and they will find different errors.
- After corrections have been made, don't forget to proof the revised document. First check to see that all the corrections were made, then read over the document one more time to make sure you didn't miss something the first time around!

USC's Writing Center

Located in the Humanities Classroom Building, Room 014, USC's Writing Center helps students with various stages of the writing process, including: brainstorm ideas for papers; formulate theses; organize ideas; develop ideas; structure arguments; identify recurring mistakes in standard punctuation, grammar, and usage; and revise drafts.

There are also satellite Writing Centers in the Academic Centers for Excellence (ACE), located in Bates House, Columbia Hall, Sims, and the Student Success Center (in the Thomas Cooper Library).

Appointments are recommended. Please call 777-2078 to set up a session (which is free) or stop by. Details about the Writing Center can be found at: <http://www.cla.sc.edu/WRIT/>

Learn more about USC's Academic Centers for Excellence. Visit www.housing.sc.edu/ACE

* Information based on the following web sites: Bemidji State University Writing Resource Center: <http://cal.bemidji.msus.edu/WRC/Handouts/ProofandEdit.html> ; The University of Arkansas On-Line Writing Lab: <http://www.uar.edu/~owl/proofreading.htm> ; PageWise, Inc.: http://ny.essortment.com/proofreadingtip_rvww.htm ; and Virginia Tech's Cook Counseling Center: <http://www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/proofing.html>