

Ten tips for proofreading

This is only a basic guide. If you have any suggestions, corrections or improvements, please contact us. You can contact us at:

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Ten tips for proofreading

- Most importantly, make sure you have a good knowledge of punctuation and grammar before you try to proofread. Unless you know what is correct, you will be in no position to spot mistakes.
- Avoid distractions. Try to proofread in a quiet environment, with no disturbances such as phones, music, background chatter and so on.
- It can help if you read the piece out loud. This helps you to spot faulty sentence construction and bad grammar.
- Give yourself frequent breaks away from the job, whether it is printed or on screen. Only you know how long you can read before you start to lose concentration, so set yourself a fixed period of time, after which you take a break.
- Remember that you are not just proofing the words and punctuation. You also need to spot inconsistencies in style and formatting, such as headings that suddenly switch font size, or a change in the size or style of bullet points.
- Be methodical. Take one line at a time. Use a ruler to guide your eyes so that you don't inadvertently miss the odd line.
- You need to concentrate on reading one word at a time. This needs practice. When we read normally, we only skim over the words, fixing our eyes on maybe four words in one line. Most people can only accurately take in about six letters in one stare, so we are relying on our (not very accurate) peripheral vision to read the letters on either side of our stare. We need to make a conscious effort to stare at each word in turn. This isn't as slow as it sounds; it's just a different reading technique.
- If you are proofing your own work, leave a decent period of time between finishing the writing and proofing it. You'll spot more mistakes if you read it with a fresh approach, as if it were a document you had never seen before.
- Don't rely on proofreading on screen. You will pick up most mistakes this way, and it's easier to correct them, but there will be some you'll miss. Always do a final proofread of the hard copy.
- Always get someone else to do a final proofread of your own work - we tend to be blind to our own mistakes.