



PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY

The Writing Center Presents:

Proofreading

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Proofreading

Proofreading is the process of finding and correcting errors in typing, spelling, punctuation, and mechanics. Plan to proofread twice: once on the edited draft from which you will prepare your final copy and once on the final draft itself.

How To Proofread Your Paper

To increase the accuracy of your proofreading, you may need to experiment with ways to keep yourself from relaxing into the rhythm and content of your writing. Here are a few tricks:

How To Proofread Your Paper

To proofread effectively, you have to learn to slow down. Some writers find that moving from word to word with a pencil slows them down enough to allow them to find errors. Others read backward to force themselves to concentrate on each word.

How To Proofread Your Paper

Read a printed copy, even if you will eventually submit the paper electronically. Most people proofread more accurately when reading type on paper than when reading it on a computer screen.

How To Proofread Your Paper

Don't view the printed copy as necessarily error-free just because it's clean. A clean-looking copy may still harbor errors.

How To Proofread Your Paper

Read you paper aloud, very slowly,
and distinctly pronounce exactly
what you see.

How To Proofread Your Paper

Ask someone else to proofread
your final draft.

How To Proofread Your Paper

Read your own paper backward, starting with the last word and work back, one word at a time, to the first, using a ruler to focus on a single line.

How To Proofread Your Paper

Use your computer's spelling checker, but note that spell checkers do not catch wrong or omitted words. Know what your spelling check can and cannot do. For example, spell check does not catch wrong words (e.g., "to much should be "too much" and missing endings ("three dog").

How To Proofread Your Paper

Reread through your paper again to
make sure there are no more
errors.

The Twenty Most Common Errors

Grammar, punctuation, and other sentence-level matters will seldom draw much attention unless they interfere with the meaning you're trying to get across. Because they do get in the way they are important to your success as a writer.

Vague pronoun reference

There are two common kinds of vague pronoun reference. The first occurs when there is more than one word that the pronoun might refer to; the second, when the reference is to a word that is implied but not explicitly stated.

Correct This Example

The troopers burned a refugee camp as a result of the earlier attack. **This** was the cause of the war.

Revised Sentence

What does *this* refer to? The editing makes clear what caused the war.

The troopers burned a refugee camp as a result of the earlier attack. This **destruction of the camp** was the cause of the war.

Missing comma after introductory element

Check your sentences to see which ones open with an introductory word, phrase, or clause. Readers usually need a small pause between the introductory element and the main part of the sentence, a pause most often signaled by a comma.

Try to get into the habit of using a comma after every introductory element, be it a word, a phrase, or a clause. When the introductory element is very short, you don't always need a comma after it. But you're never wrong if you do use a comma.

Correct This Example

Because of its isolation in a rural area surrounded by mountains Crawford Notch doesn't get many visitors.

Revised Sentence

Because of its isolation in a rural area surrounded by mountains, Crawford Notch doesn't get many visitors.

Missing comma in a compound sentence

Check to see how many of the sentences in your draft are compound sentences, sentences made up of two or more parts that could each stand alone as a sentence. When the parts are joined by and, but, so, yet, nor, or for, insert a comma to indicate a pause between the two thoughts. In very short sentences, the comma is optional if the sentence can be easily understood without it. But you'll never be wrong to use a comma.

Correct This Example



We wish dreamily upon a star and then we look down to find ourselves in mud.

Revised Sentence

We wish dreamily upon a star, and then we look down to find ourselves in mud.

Wrong Words

"Wrong word" errors come in many varieties. They can be among the hardest errors to check for, because you may not be able to see what's wrong. They can involve mixing up words that sound somewhat alike, using a word with the wrong shade of meaning, or using a word with a completely wrong meaning.

Many "wrong word" errors are due to the improper use of homonyms -- words that are pronounced alike but spelled differently, such as *their* or *there*. If wrong words are a problem for you, ask classmates or a teacher to help you scan your draft for them.

Missing comma(s) with a nonrestrictive element

A nonrestrictive element is one that is not essential to the basic meaning of the sentence. You could remove it from the sentence and the sentence would still make sense. Check your draft to be certain you've used commas to set off any part of a sentence that tells more about a word in the sentence but that your reader does not need in order to understand the word or sentence.

Correct This Example

Louis was forced to call a session of the Estates General which had not met for 175 years.

Revised Sentence

Louis was forced to call a session of the Estates General, which had not met for 175 years.

The reader does not need the clause *which had not met for 175 years* to understand which assembly the sentence is talking about because the Estates General has already been named. This clause is not essential to the basic meaning of the sentence and should be set off by a comma.

Wrong or missing verb ending

Check all of your verbs to make sure you have placed the proper endings on them. It's easy to forget the verb endings *-s* (or *-es*) and *-ed* (or *-d*) because they are not always pronounced clearly when spoken. In addition, some varieties of English use these endings in ways that are different from uses in standard academic English.

Wrong or missing preposition

Check your draft by circling all the prepositions and making certain they are the ones you meant to use, because specific prepositions express specific relationships. Many words in English are regularly used with a particular preposition to express a particular meaning. Because many prepositions are short and are not stressed or pronounced clearly in speech, they are often left out accidentally in writing. Proofread carefully, and check a dictionary when you're not sure about the preposition to use.

Correct This Example

We met **in** Union Street **at** San Francisco.

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Revised Sentence

We met **on** Union Street **in** San Francisco.

Comma Splice

Check all the commas used in your draft for comma splices, which occur only when a comma separates clauses that could each stand alone as a sentence. To correct a comma splice, you can insert a semicolon or period, add a word like *and* or *although* after the comma, or restructure the sentence.

Correct This Example

Westward migration had passed Wyoming by, even the discovery of gold in nearby Montana failed to attract settlers.

Revised Sentence

Westward migration had passed Wyoming by; even the discovery of gold in nearby Montana failed to attract settlers.

Missing or misplaced possessive apostrophe

Check all of your nouns ending in -s to see if any of them are possessives. To make a noun possessive, you must add either an apostrophe and an -s (*Ed's book*) or an apostrophe alone (*the boys' gym*). Possessive personal pronouns, however, do not take apostrophes: *hers, his, its, ours, yours*.

Unnecessary shift in tense

Check to make sure all the verb tenses in each of your sentences work together appropriately. Verb tenses tell readers when actions take place: saying "Willie *went* to school" indicates a past action whereas saying "he *will* go" indicates a future action. When you shift from one tense to another with no clear reason, you can confuse readers.

Correct This Example

Joy laughs until she **cried** at the episode of Seinfeld.

Revised Sentence

Joy laughs until she **cries** at the episode of Seinfeld.

Unnecessary shift in pronoun

Check each pronoun in your draft for unnecessary pronoun shifts, which occur when a writer who has been using one kind of pronoun to refer to someone or something shifts to another pronoun for no apparent reason. The most common shift in pronoun is from *one* to *you* or *I*.

Correct This Example

When one first sees a painting by Georgia O'keefe, you are impressed by a sense of power and stillness.

Revised Sentence

When one first sees a painting by Georgia O'keefe, **one** **is** impressed by a sense of power and stillness.

Sentence fragment

A sentence fragment is part of a sentence that is written as if it were a whole sentence, with a capital letter at the beginning and a period, question mark, or an exclamation point at the end. A fragment may lack a subject, a complete verb, or both, a fragment may depend for its meaning on the sentence before it. Check your draft for sentence fragments by reading it out loud, backwards, sentence by sentence. Out of normal order, sentence fragments stand out clearly.

Correct This Example

Marie Antoinette spent huge amounts of money on herself and her favorites. Helped bring on the French Revolution.

Revised Sentence

Sentence has no subject.

Marie Antoinette spent huge amounts of money on herself and her favorites. Her extravagance helped bring on the French Revolution.

Wrong tense or verb form

Errors of wrong tense or wrong verb form include using a verb that does not indicate clearly when an action or condition is, was, or will be completed -- for example, using *walked* instead of *had walked*, or *will go* instead of *will have gone*.

Wrong tense or verb form

Some varieties of English use the verbs *be* and *have* in ways that differ significantly from their use in standard academic or professional English. Errors may occur when a writer confuses the forms of irregular verbs (like *begin*, *began*, *begun* or *break*, *broke*, *broken*) or treats these verbs as if they followed the regular pattern -- for example, using *beginned* instead of *began*, or *have broke* instead of *have broken*.

Correct This Example

By the time Ian arrived, Jill died.

Revised Sentence

The verb *died* does not clearly indicate that the death occurred *before* Ian arrived.

By the time Ian arrived, Jill **had** died.

Lack of subject verb agreement

Check your draft for subject-verb agreement problems by circling each sentence's subject and drawing a line with an arrow to that subject's verb. You should be able to do this for each sentence. A verb must agree with its subject in number and in person.

Lack of subject verb agreement

In many cases, the verb must take a form depending on whether the subject is singular or plural: The *old man is angry and stamps into the house*, but *The old men are angry and stamp into the house*. Lack of subject-verb agreement is often just a matter of leaving the -s ending off the verb out of carelessness, or of using a form of English that does not have this ending.

Sometimes, however, this error results from particular sentence constructions.

Correct This Example

The two main goals of my life is to be generous and to have no regrets.

Revised Sentence

Here, the subject is the plural noun *goals*, not *life*.

The two main goals of my life **are** to be generous and to have no regrets.

Correct This Example

The senator and her husband commutes everyday from suburban Maryland.

Revised Sentence

If a subject has two or more parts connected by *and*, the subject is almost always plural.

The senator and her husband **commute** everyday from suburban Maryland.

Missing comma in a series

Check your draft to see if you've written any sentences containing items in a series. When three or more items appear in a series, they should be separated from one another with commas. Some newspapers do not use a comma between the last two items, but the best advice is that you'll never be wrong to use a series comma because a sentence can be ambiguous without one.

Correct This Example

Sharks eat mostly squid, shrimp, crabs and other fish.

Revised Sentence

Sharks eat mostly squid, shrimp, crabs, and other fish.

Lack of agreement between pronoun and antecedent

Check your draft for all uses of pronouns, words such as *I, it, you, her, this, themselves, someone,* and *who* that replace another word (the antecedent) so that it does not have to be repeated. Pronouns must agree with their antecedents in gender (for example, using *he* or *him* to replace *Abraham Lincoln* and *she* or *her* to replace *Queen Elizabeth*) and in number (for example, using *it* to replace *a book*, and *they* or *them* to replace *fifteen books*).

Correct This Example

Each of the puppies thrived in **their** new home.

Revised Sentence

Some pronoun problems occur with such words as *each, either, neither,* and *one,* which are singular and take singular pronouns.

Each of the puppies thrived in **its** new home.

Correct This Example

Neither Jane nor Susan felt **they** had been treated fairly.

Revised Sentence

Problems can also occur with antecedents that are joined by *or* or *nor*.

Neither Jane nor Susan felt **she** had been treated fairly.

Unnecessary comma(s) with a restrictive element

Check any words or phrases in your draft set off with commas to make sure that the element set off is not a restrictive element, one essential to the basic meaning of the sentence. Such essential words or phrases are *not* set off from the rest of the sentence with a comma or commas.

Correct This Example

People, who wanted to preserve wilderness areas, opposed the plan to privatize national parks.

Revised Sentence

The reader needs the clause *who wanted to preserve wilderness areas* because it announces which people opposed the plan. As an essential element, the clause should not be set off by commas.

People who wanted to preserve wilderness areas opposed the plan to privatize national parks.

Fused Sentence

Check each of the sentences in your draft to make certain it is not a fused sentence (also called a run-on sentence). Fused sentences are created when clauses that could each stand alone as a sentence are joined with no punctuation or words to link them. Fused sentences must either be divided into separate sentences or joined by adding words or punctuation.

Correct This Example

The current was swift he could not swim to shore.

Revised Sentence

The current was swift. **He** could not swim to shore.

Misplaced or dangling modifier

Check every modifier (whether a word, phrase, or clause) to make sure that it is as close as possible to the word it describes or relates to. Be on the lookout for misplaced modifiers that may confuse your readers by seeming to modify some other word, phrase, or clause.

Correct This Example

They could see the eagles swooping and diving with binoculars.

Revised Sentence

Who was wearing the binoculars -- the eagles?

With binoculars, they could see the eagles swooping and diving.

Dangling Modifier

Check your draft for dangling modifiers: phrases hanging precariously from the beginning or end of a sentence, attached to no other word in the sentence. The word that the phrase modifies may exist in your mind but not on paper. Proofread carefully to ensure that each modifier refers to some other word in the sentence.

Correct This Example

A doctor should check your eyes every year if over fifty.

Revised Sentence

A doctor should check your eyes every year if **you are** over fifty.

Its/It's Confusion

Use *its* to mean *belonging to it*; use *it's* only when you mean *it is* or *it has*

All Information Obtained From

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Lunsford, Andrea A. The Everyday Writer.
Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.

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