

Proofreading Techniques Writers and Tutors Can Use for Surface Features

Get a Fresh Perspective

- Take a break (as little as 5 minutes) between writing and proofreading.
- Ask someone to read the paper to you, or read the paper to someone else.
- Read the paper into a tape recorder; play back the tape while you follow along.
- Listen for
 - Places where what is read differs from what is written
 - Places where the reader stumbles for any reason, and
 - Places where the listener gets distracted, confused, or bored.

Slow Down

- Cover the writing with a ruler or a piece of paper so you can see only one line of text at a time.
- Read backward, sentence by sentence (for unclear sentence structure, redundancy).
- Read backward, word by word (for typos and spelling mistakes).
- Circle verbs (to locate passive voice, strong verbs, tense shifts).
- Circle prepositional phrases (to locate wordiness).
- Point at punctuation marks as you name each piece of a citation (for proper citation format; for example, “Last name comma year. Date colon page numbers.”)

Personalize the Process

- Begin an editing checklist of frequent mistakes. Keep the checklist for use with subsequent papers. Update it every time a paper is returned.
- Read through the paper several times, looking for a different problem each time.

Use a Computer

- Print a draft designed especially for proofreading.
- Double space. Put in extra hard returns so that each sentence starts on a new line (to locate fragments).
- Use 14-point or larger type (for apostrophe and comma problems).
- Use the find/replace function for items on your editing checklist, including wordiness flags (“to be” verbs, prepositions, etc.) and typos (from/form, extra spaces after periods, unnecessary commas, etc.).
- Use spell-check and grammar-check software. These programs are hardly foolproof, but when interpreted with a tutor who is a good editor, they can be helpful.