

## ISP Handout: Proofreading

Proofreading means examining your text carefully to find and correct typographical errors and mistakes in grammar, style, and spelling.

Proofreading is not the same as reading. When you read, the goal is to understand and/or enjoy the information that is presented to you. In contrast, the goal of proofreading is to read with the purpose of discovering errors in the text.

When you read, you are not preoccupied with verb tenses or subject-verb agreement. However, when you proofread, you want to assume that every space, letter, word, and punctuation mark could potentially contain a mistake.

### 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 between writing and proofing.** Like revising and editing, the first thing you should do before proofreading is step away from your writing and give yourself a rest. If you have time, sleep on it and come back the next day. If not, give it at least 30 minutes before returning to work. Looking at it with rested eyes will help you see mistakes you might otherwise pass over while your writing is fresh in your mind.
- **Know what to look for.** From the comments of your professors or a writing center instructor on past papers, make a list of mistakes you need to watch for.
- **Print out a hard copy.** Reading from a computer screen is not the most effective way to proofread. Having a hardcopy of your paper and a pen will help you.

### When You Proofread

- **Read slow, read aloud and read every word.** Reading aloud forces you to say each word and also lets you hear how the words sound together. When you read silently or too quickly, you may skip over errors or make unconscious corrections. Reading aloud helps you to notice run-on sentences, awkward transitions, and other grammatical and organization issues that you may not notice when reading silently. There are three ways you can read aloud:
  - Read aloud to yourself. Reading a paper aloud encourages you to read each word and can help you notice small mistakes.
  - Read aloud to a friend and have the friend give you oral feedback.
  - Have a friend read your paper aloud while you don't read along.

- **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.
- **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 sentences fragments; read through again (forward) to be sure subjects and verbs agree; etc.
- **Don't Be Afraid to Go Over Your Paper Multiple Times.** Read your paper frontwards. Read your paper backwards sentence by sentence. Read it backwards word by word. Read your paper in your head. Read it aloud. Read it slowly.
- **Point at Every Word with your Pen/Pencil.** Your brain wants to assume that what you say or think is the equivalent to what you have typed or written. However, this is not necessarily the case. By reading out loud and pointing at every word, you will have a better chance of seeing and hearing discrepancies between what you meant and what is on your paper.
- **Read from the Bottom to the Top.** Start with the last sentence of the piece you have written and then move up, sentence by sentence, to the first sentence. Reading in reverse order, you will see each sentence in isolation and be able to make more corrections.
- **Separate the text into individual sentences.** This is another technique to help you to read every sentence carefully. Simply press the return key after every period so that every line begins a new sentence. Then read each sentence separately, looking for grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors. If you're working with a printed copy, try using an opaque object like a ruler or a piece of paper to isolate the line you're working on.
- **Don't rush.** Many mistakes in writing occur because we rush. Read slowly and carefully to give your eyes enough time to spot errors.
- **Circle every punctuation mark.** This forces you to look at each one. As you circle, ask yourself if the punctuation is correct.
- **Proofreading is a learning process.** You're not just looking for errors that you recognize; you're also learning to recognize and correct new errors. This is where handbooks and dictionaries come in. Keep the ones you find helpful close at hand as you proofread.

### **After You Have Proofread**

- **Use your support network and/or study group.** Have a friend look at your paper after you have made all the corrections you identified. A new reader will be able to help you catch mistakes that you might have overlooked.