

# General Strategies for Editing and Proofreading

While revision occurs throughout the writing process and involves such tasks as rethinking, overall structure, focus, thesis and support, **editing** and **proofreading** assume that the writer is working on the final draft and is in the process of making the paper correct. Correct punctuation, grammar, spelling, sentence structure, style, and word choice are important to the reader because they drastically affect perceptions of the writers authority and credibility.

In general, effective editing and proofreading require that you reread your writing carefully, that you play the role of reader rather than writer, and that you use strategies to help you slow down and examine your writing. This handout presents strategies for both editing and proofreading.

## Editing

Editing is the process writers use to catch errors typical to their own writing. Because editing focuses on problems that are particular to an individual writer and that occur again and again effective editing requires that you know the types of errors you typically make and that you have specific strategies for finding those errors.

1. *Read the paper aloud as if you are reading a story.* Listen for errors. If you listen carefully, you will be able to correct any errors that you hear. Listen for incomplete phrases, sentences and ideas, as well as things that sound funny.
  - Stop and change anything you wish as soon as you see it punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure. Move through the paper at a reasonable rate.
  - Read the entire paper. Listen for spots that aren't readable, that feel or sound awkward, or that don't seem clear. Mark these spots. Then, when you're done reading the whole paper, go back to fix them.
  - Allow yourself some time between writing your paper and editing. Ideally, wait a day; this allows the writing to get cold, giving you an opportunity to "see" the errors. If you can't wait a day, go away and do something else for a while work for another class, cleaning, eating so that you can return to your work with a fresh mind and fresh eyes.
2. *Read one sentence at a time.*
  - Using a sheet of clean paper, cover all the text except the first sentence. Read this sentence carefully. Does it sound and look correct? Does it say what you want it to say? Continue down the page in the same way.
3. *Look for patterns of error.*
  - *Personal patterns:* All writers make mistakes that are typical of their writing. If you always forget commas, check for commas. If you always have trouble with transitions, look for transitions. If you work on wordiness, look for this. Bring your essays to the writing center! A tutor can help you to locate the patterns of error.
  - *List:* Keep a list of your trouble spots. Use this as a checklist and refer to it as you edit.
4. *Know your grammar and punctuation rules or know where to look them up.*
  - Study the rules of grammar and punctuation. Review the ones you don't know. If you have a writing handbook or handouts, keep them out when you write. Refer to them when you have questions as you write and edit.

## Proofreading

Proofreading, the final stage, focuses on random goofs. The final draft has been corrected, but sometimes, because of computer error, fatigue, carelessness, or oversight, mistakes are still present. It is important to go through the paper one last time to catch these random goofs.

1. *Read the paper as a reader.*
  - Read and enjoy your work. Sit back, and read the paper as if you were the teacher. What do you notice?
2. *Read one sentence/paragraph at a time.*
  - Take a clean sheet of paper, and place it under the first sentence of your paper. Read this sentence carefully. Do you see any mistakes, typos, or careless omissions?

3. *Read backwards.*

- Start at the bottom of the page on the right side. Look at the words from right to left, check for spelling/typographical errors.