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Where do I begin?

Summary:

Proofreading is primarily about searching your writing for errors, both grammatical and typographical, before submitting your paper for an audience (a teacher, a publisher, etc.). Use this resource to help you find and fix common errors.

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Though everyone has a unique proofreading process, there are some general strategies that can be helpful to most writers. Begin improving your proofreading skills by trying out the guidelines listed below.

General Strategies

- Take a break! Allow yourself some time between writing and proofing. Even a five-minute break is productive because it will help you get some distance from what you have written. The goal is to return with a fresh eye and mind.
- Leave yourself enough time. Since many errors are made by speeding through writing and proofreading, you should take your time to look over your writing carefully. This will help you to catch errors you might otherwise miss. Always read through your writing slowly. If you read at a normal speed, you won't give your eyes sufficient time to spot errors.
- Read aloud. Reading a paper aloud encourages you to read every little word.
- Role-play. While reading, put yourself in your audience's shoes. Playing the role of the reader encourages you to see the paper as your audience might.
- Get others involved. Asking a friend or a Writing Lab tutor to read your paper will let you get another perspective on your writing and a fresh reader will be able to help you catch mistakes that you might have overlooked.

Personalizing Proofreading

In addition to following the general guidelines above, individualizing your proofreading process to your needs will help you proofread more efficiently and effectively. You won't be able to check for everything (and you don't have to), so you should find out what your typical problem areas are and look for each type of error individually. Here's how:

- Find out what errors you typically make. Review instructors' comments about your writing and/or review your paper with a Writing Lab tutor.
 - Learn how to fix those errors. Talk with your instructor and/or with a Writing Lab tutor. The instructor and the tutor can help you understand why you make the errors you do so that you can learn to avoid them.
 - Use specific strategies. Use the strategies detailed on the following pages to find and correct your particular errors in usage, sentence structure, and spelling and punctuation.
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