



## Proofreading Strategies

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For more information on proofreading, see the Purdue OWL's other handouts on the subjects:

- Steps in Editing at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl\\_stepedit.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_stepedit.html)
  - Editing and Proofreading Strategies for Revision at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl\\_edit.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_edit.html)
  - Proofreading Your Paper at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl\\_proof2.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_proof2.html)
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No matter how many times you read through a "finished" paper, you're likely to miss many of your most frequent errors. This handout will help you proofread more effectively . . .

- by giving you some useful general strategies for proofreading well
- by giving you strategies which personalize proofreading so you can identify errors you typically make (You don't need to check for everything. It's more efficient to know your typical problem areas and make several passes through the paper for them.)
- by giving you specific strategies for finding and correcting those errors.

## General Strategies

Begin by taking a break. Allow yourself some time between writing and proofing. Even a five-minute break is productive because it will help get some distance from what you have written. The goal is to return with a fresh eye and mind.

The following strategies will help you *slow down* as you read through a paper and will therefore help you catch mistakes that you might otherwise overlook. As you use these strategies, remember to work 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.

### Read with a "cover"

Sliding a blank sheet of paper down the page as you read encourages you to make a detailed, line-by-line review of the paper.

### Role-play

Playing the role of the reader encourages you to see the paper as your audience might.

## Strategies Which Personalize Proofreading

In addition to using the general strategies already listed, you'll need to personalize the proofreading process.

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(s) 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 organization and paragraphing, usage and sentence structure, and spelling and punctuation.

To locate and correct errors in your papers, find the strategies on the following pages which correspond to your typical problem areas and follow the step-by-step instructions provided for you. Each strategy is designed to focus your attention on only one particular error, so to be most effective, use only one strategy at a time. (Ask a Writing Lab tutor about any terms you don't understand and/or refer to Lab handouts.)

## Organization and Paragraphing

## Thesis/Focus/Main Point

1. Find your paper's thesis statement. Copy it on another sheet of paper. If your thesis is not directly stated, write down a possible thesis.
2. Locate the central idea of each paragraph and try to reduce that idea to a word or phrase. If you cannot decide on one phrase, list two or three options.
3. List the paragraph ideas. List these in order under your thesis.
4. Decide whether your paragraphs clearly relate to your thesis. If not, either rewrite your thesis to incorporate the unrelated ideas or eliminate the unrelated paragraphs.

For more information, consult the OWL handout on thesis statements at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/workshops/hypertext/ResearchW/examp.html>.

## Paragraph Clarity

1. Locate the central idea of each paragraph. Reduce that idea to a word or phrase.
2. Look at each paragraph randomly. Consider only the information in that paragraph.
3. Ask yourself whether you offer enough details in the paragraph to support that word or idea.
4. Decide whether all of your details are relevant.
5. Ask yourself whether all of the information is related enough to be in the same paragraph. Should you create another paragraph or move some of the details to another paragraph?

For more information, consult the OWL handout on paragraphs at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl\\_pgrph.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_pgrph.html).

## Overall Coherence

1. See whether you have clear transitions between paragraphs. If not, clarify existing transitions, add new ones, and/or rearrange your paragraphs to make transitions clearer.

For more information, consult the OWL handouts on transitions at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl\\_transition.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_transition.html) and coherence at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl\\_cohere.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_cohere.html).

## Usage and Sentence Structure

### Subject/Verb Agreement

1. Find the main verb in each sentence.
2. Match the verb to its subject.
3. Make sure that the subject and verb agree in number.

For more information, consult the OWL handout on subject/verb agreement at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/eslsubverb.html>.

### Pronoun Reference/Agreement

1. Skim your paper, stopping at each pronoun. Look especially at it, this, they, their, and them.
2. Search for the noun that the pronoun replaces. If you can't find any noun, insert one beforehand or change the pronoun to a noun. If you can find a noun, be sure it agrees in number and person with your pronoun.

See the OWL handout on pronouns at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_pronuse.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_pronuse.html).

### Parallel Structure

1. Skim your paper, stopping at key words that signal parallel structures. Look especially for and, or, not only...but also, either... or, neither...nor, both...and.
2. Make sure that the items connected by these words (adjectives, nouns, phrases, etc.) are in the same grammatical form.

For more information, see the OWL handout on parallel structure at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_parallel.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_parallel.html).

## Spelling and Punctuation

### Spelling

1. Examine each word in the paper individually.

Move from the end of each line back to the beginning. Pointing with a pencil helps you really see each word.

2. If necessary, check a dictionary to see that each word is spelled correctly.

For more information, see the OWL handout on spelling at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/index.html#spelling>.

### Compound Sentence Commas

1. Skim for the conjunctions and, but, for, or, nor, so and yet.
2. See whether there is a complete sentence on each side of the conjunction.

If so, place a comma before the conjunction.

For more information, see the OWL handout on compound sentence commas at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_clause.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_clause.html).

### Introductory Commas

1. Skim your paper, looking only at the first two or three words of each sentence.
2. Stop if one of these words is a dependent marker, a transition word, a participle, or a preposition.
3. Listen for a possible break point before the main clause.
4. Place a comma at the end of the introductory phrase or clause (which is before the independent clause).

For more information, see the OWL handout on commas after introductions at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_commaint.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_commaint.html).

### Comma Splices

1. Skim the paper, stopping at every comma.
2. See whether there is a complete sentence on each side of the comma. If so, add a coordinating conjunction after the comma or replace the comma with a semicolon.

For more information, see the OWL handout on commas at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_comma.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_comma.html).

### Fragments

1. Look at each sentence to see whether it contains an independent clause.
2. Pay special attention to sentences that begin with dependent marker words (such as because) or phrases such as for example or such as.
3. See if the sentence might be just a piece of the previous sentence that mistakenly got separated by a period.

For more information, see the OWL handout on sentence fragments at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_frag.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_frag.html).

### Run-On Sentences

1. Review each sentence to see whether it contains more than one independent clause. Start with the last sentence of your paper, and work your way back to the beginning, sentence by sentence.
2. Break the sentence into two sentences if necessary.

See the OWL handout on comma splices at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_sentpr.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_sentpr.html).

### Apostrophes

1. Skim your paper, stopping only at those words which end in "s."
2. See whether or not each "s" word needs an apostrophe. If an apostrophe is needed, you will be able to invert the word order and say "of" or "of the":

- Mary's hat
- the hat of Mary

For more information, consult OWL Handout on the apostrophe at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_apost.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_apost.html).

## Left-Out Words

1. Read the paper aloud, pointing to every word as you read. Don't let your eye move ahead until you spot each word.
2. Also, make sure that you haven't doubled any words.

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The following information must remain intact on every handout printed for distribution.

This page is located at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/general/gl\\_proof.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/general/gl_proof.html)

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