

# *THE "WRITE" STUFF*

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#### ***THE SECRET TO WRITING WELL: EDITING!!***

Have you ever gotten back a paper from a professor that had so many red marks on it that it looked like it was "bleeding"? When you looked over those marks, were you shocked that you made the mistakes that you did? You probably forgot, or ran out of time, to proofread.

PROOFREADING is one of the most important yet overlooked steps in the writing process. Taking the time to proofread will inevitably save you from embarrassment. It allows you--rather than your professor or your boss--to discover where your ideas don't make sense, or you misspelled a donor's name, or you left the "s" off of "assess" . . . You get the idea. Here are a number of ways to proofread your work.

#### **PROOFREADING FOR COMPLETENESS**

Before you hand in an assignment, make certain that you've done it correctly and completely. BEFORE you begin to write, read the assignment carefully and make sure that you understand what the professor is asking you to do. AFTER you finish, check to see that you have completed all of the steps in the assignment. You might even read through your work and mark in pencil in the left margin where you have done each part of the assignment.

#### **PROOFREADING FOR CLARITY AND ORGANIZATION**

You also want to make sure that your writing makes sense. After you've written an essay, make an OUTLINE of it by writing down the topic sentence of each paragraph. Then analyze your outline. Are your ideas clear? Do they follow in a logical order? If not, resequence your paragraphs or add transitions to your topic sentences to move smoothly from one idea to the next. Finally, read each sentence in each paragraph to make sure it belongs there. If not, move it to a more appropriate place, delete it, or rewrite it.

Take note: it's best to wait AT LEAST a day after you've written your draft to proofread for clarity and organization. Remember the old adage to "sleep on it"? It works for writing, too. Getting some distance from your work helps you look at it more objectively and with fresh eyes.

#### **PROOFREADING FOR MISTAKES**

Here's how to catch common but careless mistakes like dropped words, unintentionally repeated words, misused words, and embarrassing misspellings: READ YOUR ESSAY OUT LOUD, slowly and completely. I know it sounds strange, but it really works! For some reason, our eyes "correct" our mistakes for us, but our ears do not. You'll be surprised how many errors you catch when you read your work aloud. In fact, once you try it, you'll probably never neglect to do it again.

A word of caution: do not trust "spellcheck" to catch these errors. "Spell-check" can't "read for meaning." Therefore, "spellcheck" doesn't know that you meant to write "bear" instead of "bare"--both are "real" words. Nor does it realize that you meant to write "I do not wish to give a presentation at the conference" instead of "I do wish to give a presentation." While it is good to use "spellcheck," overrelying on it is a mistake.

Nor should you put much faith in “grammar check.” Again, computers can’t “read for meaning.” Therefore, when “grammar check” tells you that you’ve got a run-on sentence, it’s really saying, “My programming indicates that you’ve used too many words in a row.” That’s it. Your ear is a much better judge of whether or not you’ve got a run-on or a fragment than “grammar check.”

### **FIND A PROOFREADER**

Why not? In many offices, no piece of correspondence gets mailed out until at least two people have read it--for content and for errors. If you have a family member, friend, or colleague who proofreads well, don’t hesitate to ask him or her to read over your work.

### **PROOFREADING FOR YOUR “FAVORITE” MISTAKES**