

INSTITUTE WRITING PROGRAM

THE WRITING CENTER

Proofreading Strategies and the Dirty Dozen

Save proofreading for last.

There's no sense in devoting your energy to spotting typos and sentence-level errors when you still need to re-organize, add content, or re-write some of your original draft. Proofreading should always be the last step in your writing process--that way, you won't miss anything or have to go back and proofread something again.

Read out loud.

Reading your paper out loud is one of the best ways to proofread. You should take care to pay close attention as you read aloud--to the words on the page, the words that come out of your mouth, and to your body as you read. Do the words on the page match what you're saying? Often, we will unconsciously correct mistakes as we read by saying something slightly different than what's written. You want to notice when you automatically correct a mistake and note the change on the draft.

You also want to notice how you feel as you read. Are you out of breath? Do the sentences have a rhythmic or rocking feel? If you run out of breath as you read, you might need to shorten a sentence or change the punctuation. If you feel lulled to sleep, you might want to think about repetitive phrasing.

Read backwards.

You might find yourself getting caught up in the content of your paper, or you might have trouble slowing down your reading and paying attention to the individual words and phrases. If that's the case, you might try starting with the end of the paper. Read the last sentence, looking for any errors, then read the second-to-last sentence. This way, the individual sentences will make sense, but they won't connect to each other, making it easier to focus on the sentences rather than the overall content of the paper.

Get physical.

Changing mediums can help you see your paper with new eyes. If you've been drafting on your computer, print your paper out for the final review. Grab a brightly colored pen. You might even change locations.

Know your weak spots.

Do you tend to have trouble with subject-verb agreement? Do you often mix up their/there/they're? Are you prone to writing really long sentences that, while technically correct, string one clause to another and add prepositional phrases on top of lists and ultimately take up more space than they perhaps should? If you can identify patterns of error in your writing, you can take some time to focus on and correct those patterns. Once you've identified a pattern or issue, read through your paper and focus on identifying only that one issue.

Know the dirty dozen writing errors.

Familiarize yourself with the following errors, which are among the most common that writers tend to make.



The Dirty Dozen

Fragments	After twenty years in prison.
Fused sentences	The picnic takes place on Saturday the potluck will be the following Wednesday.
Comma-splices	I submitted several proposals to my boss, he said that he will review them and get back to me.
Subject-verb agreement	My sister and her friend wants to go see the movie with me.
Misplaced modifiers	I picked out a book and gave it to my mom from the ones on the shelf.
Dangling modifiers	Surveying the damage, the tree limb had decimated the car.
Pronoun-antecedent agreement	Even though John ate two pizzas, they were still hungry.
Vague or ambiguous pronouns	James and David both went to see a movie, but then he got tired and went home.
Lack of parallelism	In the summer I like to swim, fish and running in the woods.
Inappropriate shift in person or tense	The fullback passed me the ball and I give it to the striker.
Apostrophe use	I ate two dozen egg's in one sitting. My teachers presentation was confusing.
Faulty predication	The purpose of the article persuades readers to take action.