

## Editorial Graphics and Publishing Services

### Ten Tips for Proofreading Effectively

There's no foolproof formula for perfect proofreading every time. As Mark Twain realized, it's just too tempting to see what we *meant* to write rather than the words that actually appear on the page or screen. But these 10 tips should help you see (or hear) your errors before anybody else does.

1. Give it a rest.

If time allows, set your text aside for a few hours (or days) after you've finished composing, and then proofread it with fresh eyes. Rather than remember the perfect paper you meant to write, you're more likely to see what you've actually written.

2. Look for one type of problem at a time.

Read through your text several times, concentrating first on sentence structures, then word choice, then spelling, and finally punctuation. As the saying goes, if you look for trouble, you're likely to find it.

3. Double-check facts, figures, and proper names.

In addition to reviewing for correct spelling and usage, make sure that all the information in your text is accurate.

4. Review a hard copy.

Print out your text and review it line by line: rereading your work in a different format may help you catch errors that you previously missed.

5. Read your text aloud.

Or better yet, ask a friend or colleague to read it aloud. You may hear a problem (a faulty verb ending, for example, or a missing word) that you haven't been able to see.

6. Use a spell checker.

The spell checker can help you catch repeated words, reversed letters, and many other common errors--but it's certainly not goof proof.

7. Trust your dictionary.

Your spell checker can tell you only if a word is a word, not if it's the right word. For instance, if you're not sure whether sand is in a desert or a dessert, visit the dictionary (or our Glossary of Commonly Confused Words).

8. Read your text backward.

Another way to catch spelling errors is to read backward, from right to left, starting with the last word in your text. Doing this will help you focus on individual words rather than sentences.

9. Create your own proofreading checklist.

Keep a list of the types of mistakes you commonly make, and then refer to that list each time you proofread.

10. Ask for help.

Invite someone else to proofread your text after you have reviewed it. A new set of eyes may immediately spot errors that you've overlooked.

Now, if you're ready to put these proofreading tips to the test, practice your skills at [Proofreading for Errors in Verb Tense](#).