



## School of Liberal Arts

University Writing Center  
"Because writers need readers"

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### *Proofreading: A "Late" Concern*

*When you are working on a writing assignment, consider concerns such as focus, organization, and specific detail **early** in your revision process. Proofreading is a **late** concern, one you should think about later, after you have dealt with **early** concerns. The word "proofreading" refers to a final reading and correction of a draft, or "proof," written to be published. Professional proofreaders are very concerned that what eventually appears in print is as clear and correct as possible. As a student, you also need to strive for clarity and accuracy in your written work. During your college years, you have ample time to become a skilled proofreader of your own writing, assisted on a regular basis by tutors in the University Writing Center.*

#### **Some Recommended Strategies:**

- Set the draft aside for a while, so that it will be less familiar to you.
- Look specifically for errors you know you often make.
- Read the draft through several times, each time looking only for a limited number of specific problems.
- Read the draft from the **end** to the **beginning**, so that each sentence does not depend on a previous sentence for its meaning.
- Read the draft out loud, listening to what your words actually **say**.
- Let someone else read your draft out loud. The reader might stumble over an error you have overlooked, and you will **hear** it.
- Use a computer grammar checker, but do not be overly dependent on it. Be sure you understand any suggestions and make your own decisions about changes.
- Use a spelling checker, but do not depend too much on it. It will have a limited vocabulary and will not detect homonyms (there, their, they're; to, too, two)

#### **Things to Look for** ~ Some basic writing errors you might look for are

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>SENTENCE FRAGMENTS</b> Fragments are parts of sentences that are set off as separate sentences.</li> </ul> |
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Example: Our new printer arrived yesterday. **After we had waited for six weeks.**

Revised: Our new printer arrived yesterday, after we had waited for six weeks.

Example: One of my fondest wishes is a simple one. **To learn how to play golf.**

Revised: One of my fondest wishes is a simple one--to learn how to play golf.

Example: Chris worked all day. **Then danced all night.**

Revised: Chris worked all day, and then danced all night.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>COMMA SPLICES OR FUSED (RUN-ON) SENTENCES</b> Comma splices occur when two separate sentences are joined by a comma without an additional connector such as "and," "or," or "but." Fused (run-on) sentences occur when two sentences are joined without even a comma.</li> </ul> |
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Comma splice: We swam, then we went home.

Revised: We swam, **and** then we went home. OR We swam; then we went home.

Fused (run-on) sentence: We did not want money we wanted food.

Revised: We did not want money. We wanted food. OR Instead of money, we wanted food.

- **SHIFTS IN SENTENCE STRUCTURE** These problems occur when sentences do not end as their beginnings indicate that they will.

Example: By releasing the water at this stage in the process helps to maintain product consistency.

Revised: Releasing the water at this stage helps to maintain product consistency. OR  
By releasing the water at this stage, workers maintain product consistency.

- **ERRORS IN SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT** Singular subjects require singular verbs; plural subjects require plural verbs.

Example: The **goal** (singular subject) of the directives issued by the committee **were** (plural verb) to improve working conditions.

Revised: The goal of the directives issued by the committee **was** (singular verb) to improve working conditions.

Example: Many **singers** (plural subject) in the choir **takes** (singular verb) singing lessons.

Revised: Many singers in the choir **take** (plural verb) singing lessons.

- **ERRORS IN PRONOUN REFERENCE** Pronouns and their antecedents (the words they refer to) should agree in number (singular or plural).

Example: **Everyone** (singular antecedent) needs to bring **their** (plural pronoun) reports on Tuesday.

Revised: **All students** (plural antecedent) need to bring **their** (plural pronoun) reports on Tuesday.

Revised: **Everyone** (singular antecedent) needs to bring **his or her** (singular pronoun) report on Tuesday.

- **ADDITIONAL ERRORS IN PRONOUN USE (“WHO” AND “WHOM”; “I” AND “ME”)** “Who” and “I” are used as the subjects of verbs, and “whom” and “me” are used as objects.

Example: **Whom** did you say **was calling**?

Revised: **Who** did you say **was calling**? (“Who” is the subject of the verb “was calling.”)

Example: Janet cooked dinner for Lisa and **I**.

Revised: Janet cooked dinner for Lisa and **me**. (“Me” is the object of the preposition “for.”  
Try the sentence without “Lisa.” Janet cooked dinner for **me**.)

- **“DANGLING” MODIFIERS** These words refer to (or modify) the wrong words.

Example: **Using my assignment sheet**, the paper was easy to write. (The sentence **says** that the **paper** was using the assignment sheet.)

Revised: Using my assignment sheet, **I** was easily able to write the paper. (This sentence correctly says that **I** was using the assignment sheet.)

- **ERRORS IN USING POSSESSIVE APOSTROPHES** Apostrophes are used to show possession. The placement of the apostrophe depends on whether the word is used as a possessive is singular or plural. For example: **The parents'** (plural) child pulled the **puppy's** (singular) tail.

Example: A single **parents** (singular) life is often difficult.

Revised: A single **parent's** life is often difficult.

Example: Many **students** (plural) records were lost in the fire.

Revised: Many **students'** records were lost in the fire.

- **ERRORS IN COMMA USAGE** Make sure you can explain **why** you have used each comma. A major problem with commas is the “comma splice,” discussed separately above.

According to *The Heath Guide to Grammar and Usage* by Gerald P. Mulderig, published in 1995, major uses of the comma are as indicated below.

**Use a comma between independent clauses linked by a coordinating conjunction.**

Example: I saw this antique desk at a garage sale, and I knew I had to own it.

**Use a comma to set off an introductory element.**

Example: **When I learned the price of the desk**, I realized I could afford it.

Example: **Driving very slowly**, she made her way down the steep and winding road.

**Use commas to separate elements in a series.**

Example: The sides, drawers, and feet of the desk feature hand-carved details.

**Use a comma to separate coordinate modifiers.**

Example: The clear, smooth finish of the desk’s top is particularly attractive.

**Use commas to set off a non-restrictive modifier.**

Example: Desks like this one, **which is constructed of solid oak**, have not been made for decades. (Do not use a comma with a **restrictive** modifier--one which is necessary for meaning. Example: Students **who have missed ten classes** will not pass this course.)

**Use commas to set off a parenthetical element (one which could be placed in parentheses).**

Example: This desk, **in my opinion**, is worth far more than I paid for it.

- **SPELLING ERRORS** Many readers regard spelling mistakes as indications of a general sloppiness of mind. Good spelling helps you establish yourself as a person who writes with precision and care.

**SOME HANDY RULES:**

- Put “**i**” before “**e**” (believe, mischief, grieve, niece, obedience, relieve, shield, sieve)
- Except after “**c**” in words with a long “**e**” sound. (ceiling, conceit, receive, conceive, deceive, perceive)
- Words with other vowel sounds are spelled differently. (ancient, science, efficient)
- When the two vowels sound like “**a**” the “**e**” comes before the “**i**.” (eight, freight, heir, neighbor, reign, veil, vein, sleigh, weight)
- BUT, of course, there are exceptions.** (caffeine, counterfeit, either, neither, foreigner, forfeit, height, leisure, protein, seize, sovereign, weird)

- **SIMILAR WORDS:** Many words are often used inappropriately because similar words that either sound or look the same have different meanings and purposes.

**your** (belonging to, possessive)

**whose** (of or belonging to, possessive)

**to** (preposition, infinitive: We went **to** school. James wants **to** sing)

**their** (belonging to them – possessive)

**than** (introducing the second element of a comparison: We would rather have pancakes **than** cereal.)

**principal** (the person in charge; a sum of money: The **principal** is your pal.)

**you’re** (you are – contraction)

**who’s** (who is – contraction)

**too** (also, to a greater extent than desirable: Ralph cried **too**. We had **too** many doughnuts)

**they’re** (they are – contraction)

**then** (at the same time; next; in that case: Sam raced, and **then** collapsed.)

**principle** (a truth or law)

<b>passed</b> (an action of passing which has already occurred: We <b>passed</b> the test.)	<b>past</b> (gone by in time: The history teacher reviewed the recent <b>past</b> .)
<b>lose</b> (to be deprived of or cease to have: We do not want to <b>lose</b> our game today.)	<b>loose</b> (not restrained or confined; slack or relaxed: They turned the dogs <b>loose</b> .)
<b>lay</b> (to put down or set down; the past but not the present tense of “lie”: Please <b>lay</b> your books here.)	<b>lie</b> (to make an untrue statement; to recline: Doris and Angie planned to <b>lie</b> out in the sun all day on Saturday.)
<b>its</b> (belonging to it – possessive)	<b>it’s</b> (it is – contraction)
<b>affect</b> (to influence or touch the feelings of – verb)	<b>effect</b> (result, consequence, impression—noun)
<b>accept</b> (to receive; to believe to be correct)	<b>except</b> (not including – preposition)
<b>participate</b> (to take part; join or share with others – verb)	<b>participant</b> (one that participates or takes part in something – noun)

Remember that you will be able to “spot” only one or two errors in a single reading of your draft. **Allow yourself enough time for multiple readings.**

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