



Proofreading

This is when you get down to the nitty-gritty. When you proofread you are looking for mistakes and errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, referencing, and formatting. There's no other way to do that than to read through your essay very carefully. Sure, you can run your word processor's spell-check feature, but it's more likely to be a hindrance than a help. A lot of contextual language features simply can't be understood by an automated system (yet), plus the spell check tool in Microsoft Word doesn't always understand Australian English. (The **Grammarly** add-on, however, might help!)

The Spelling & Grammar tool in Microsoft Word also allows for user submissions, so if you're using a public computer, beware. Users before you may have marked incorrect spellings and grammar constructions as correct, so Word won't notice if you've made a mistake.

Anyway, there's more to proofreading than making sure the words are spelt correctly. Spell check can't always tell you if you've used the correct form of a verb, or if a comma is in the right place. So, DIY is always the way to go.

This section assumes you are working solo. If you have a group assignment, see also **Writing together** (PDF, 60 kB), but you might also find the information below useful for your group.

As you go through, you are looking for the following:

- **Spelling errors and typing mistakes**
- **Grammatical errors** e.g. incomplete sentences, subject-verb disagreement, correct use of definite and indefinite articles, inconsistent tense
 - **Inappropriate language for academic writing**, e.g. contractions and abbreviations
 - **Correct form of in-text citations and/or footnotes**
 - **Appropriate vocabulary**, including technical terms
- If you have any **visual material**, like tables, graphs, or diagrams, check that they are **properly labelled and positioned**
 - **Correct use of punctuation**, especially commas
 - **Quotations** enclosed in quotation marks
- That **every in-text citation has a matching entry in the reference list, and vice versa**
- That the **reference list or bibliography is correctly formatted** according to the required citation style and arranged in appropriate order, usually alphabetical by author surname

You're also looking for internal consistency, i.e. is everything within the document the same, such as:

- **Fonts:** same typeface, same size, same colour
- **Quotation marks:** use single OR double but not both, unless it's to mark a quotation within a quotation
- **Indentations:** do you indent at the start of a new paragraph, or do you leave a clear line between paragraphs instead?
- **Spelling:** where words can be spelt more than one way, are you consistent and/or following the guidelines of your unit or discipline? E.g. realise vs realize
- **Page numbers:** are they numbered consecutively? If you are required to include your name and Student ID or any other information, have you done so?

Finally, attach any cover sheets, save a digital copy in more than one location, keep a hard copy for yourself, and submit!

More information

- Grammarly Grammar Checker
- PASS at Western Sydney University
- UNSW: Editing Checklist
- University of Minnesota: Editing and Proofreading Strategies
- The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill: Editing and Proofreading