

## POLISHING YOUR PAPER

**What's the difference between revision, proof-reading, and editing?**

**Revision** describes the process of re-reading and improving an essay by focusing on the coherence (or logical organization) of the paper. Revision therefore involves asking whether or not the essay content and structure effectively communicates the main point or purpose of the paper.

**Proof-reading** focuses more on correcting sentence-level mistakes. It describes the process of re-reading an essay in order to check it for errors in grammar, sentence structure and word choice, as well as for errors in formatting (like font and margin size) and citation. Proof-reading is usually the last stage of the writing process.

**Editing** is another term your professors or markers might use. Generally, editing is used to describe both revision and proof-reading. Strong writers always both revise and proof-read their work.

### PROOF-READING TECHNIQUES

1. **Read Your Paper Out Loud:** Read your paper out loud slowly, and highlight any words, phrases or sentences that cause you to stumble as you're reading. Revise those words or phrases until you can read them without stumbling—until they “flow” smoothly. When you can read your writing out loud without difficulty, it's usually a sign that you've fixed any awkward phrasing or grammar mistakes.
2. **Get Some Distance:** Sometimes we cannot recognize errors or problems in our own writing, because as we read, our mind automatically corrects any mistakes that it encounters (like missing words, typos, etc). The solution: finish your paper at least a day in advance of the due date, and spend some time away from your paper. Once you've gotten some distance from it, return to it and read it out loud. Hopefully by then you'll be able to see or hear mistakes that you couldn't before.
3. **Get a Second Opinion:** A fresh pair of eyes will always catch mistakes and problems that tired eyes, well-acquainted with a piece of writing, can't see. Ask a friend or classmate to read your work for you. Be sure not to ask them to correct your writing—this could be portrayed as academic dishonesty, and they might make mistakes, too. Instead, ask them to underline any parts of your writing that may be problematic (i.e., any words or phrases that read awkwardly, or that might contain mistakes).
4. **Word Search:** Use the word search function on your word processor to help you find repeated words in your paper (in Microsoft Word, press Control + F). First, read over your paper or have someone else read over it to identify any repetitive language. Then, use the word search function to find each repetition of that word. You can then replace the repetitions with synonyms or a different phrase.

# ACADEMIC

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- 5. Divide and Conquer:** If you consistently make grammatical or punctuation errors, you often won't catch them simply by reading your writing out loud. This is because you won't be able to recognize them as errors because you've internalized them. So, how do you fix these persistent errors? Read the feedback you've received on previous assignments. Did the marker identify particular mistakes (like comma use, or verb tense)? If so, when you sit down to proof-read your paper, underline each example of that "problem area." For example, if you consistently have problems with verb tense, underline each verb in your essay. Then, check each underlined verb to see that you're using it correctly. If you're not sure, see a Writing Assistant at the Student Success Centre, or refer to a grammar resource to learn the rules for grammar and punctuation.
- 6. Educate Yourself:** In order to improve as a writer, it is important that you learn how to fix grammatical and punctuation mistakes yourself. As you learn how to identify these errors, and practice fixing them, your writing will begin to improve: you will see that you begin to make less and less of these errors in the first place. To learn how to do this, refer to books on grammar and writing, visit online Writing Centres and check their resource pages, and check the style guide for your discipline (e.g., the Chicago Manual of Style, or the MLA Guidebook) for their sections on grammar and punctuation.

## WRITING RESOURCES

**Style Guides:** The same style guides that explain citation rules for your discipline also usually have detailed information about grammar and punctuation. Take out the style guide for your discipline from the library, or check out their website (if they have one) online.

**Books:** *Fit to Print and Checkmate*, by Joanne Buckley; *The Little, Brown Handbook*; *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*, by Lynn Truss; *Fundamentals of English Grammar*; *Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing*, by Mignon Fogarty.

**Websites:** *Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue* (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl>); *Guide to Grammar and Writing* (<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar>).

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