

The Single Biggest Reason To Proofread

By Nona Langley

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The Single Biggest Reason Why You Absolutely Must Proofread Your Writing, Plus 10 Hints To Help You Do It Better

By Nona Langley

The single biggest reason why you absolutely must proofread your work is a very simple one:

Money.

The old adage about only getting one chance to make a first impression is seldom more important than it is with the written word. Get it wrong and it will cost you.

Imagine this - it's a hot day. You've been outside playing sport, doing the gardening, or running with the dog. Whatever it is, you're hot! You grab your favorite drink from the fridge, put it to your lips and feel the cold liquid gurgling down your throat, refreshing you. Ah, what bliss. But then, suddenly, something catches in your throat and you cough, spitting out your drink. Aaarrrrggghhh! A fly! Suddenly the wonderful refreshing feeling isn't so wonderful any more, is it? ^{f^o} All because of a tiny little fly. Spoils the experience, doesn't it?

Or this - you're in a theater listening to your favorite classical piece. Someone plays a wrong note. Kinda wakes you up doesn't it?

What happened in both of these cases is that a process which should have been smooth suddenly wasn't, and it spoilt the experience.

What's this got to do with writing? Everything! Whatever you write, you write for one purpose and one only. To get YOUR idea from YOUR HEAD into SOMEONE ELSE'S. Nothing else, that's it.

Now, you'd have to agree, the smoother that process, the less "friction", the better the result. Pretty clear isn't it?

And in most cases, either directly or indirectly, sooner or later, a "better result" means more money. When you're trying to get something across - a sales letter, a thesis, a novel, a business proposition - you simply can't afford to interrupt the flow with unnecessary "friction".

You must not put a fly in your reader's drink!

You must not play the wrong note when you're playing him your sales melody!

It's a funny thing, proofreading. Readers will never say "wow, that book had no spelling mistakes". A well-written book, web page, article, whatever, will convey its message without "friction". But a book, web page or article with errors will be just like the fly, or the wrong note. The flow of ideas will be disrupted just as surely as if you had slapped the reader round the head . . .

And you just can't afford that disruption, because it WILL cost you money!

Want a real, live, recent example? Within the last two weeks, two people emailed me asking for work as a proofreader. Presumably they want to make some money at it. Both emails had spelling mistakes! How do you think THAT affected their income? Big time!

Here are ten hints to help you with your proofreading:

1. Read widely and often. I doubt if there are any good proofreaders in the world who do not read many, many books.
2. Use the spell checker. Don't rely on it, but use it as the first step. Remember it will only check correct spelling, not usage.
3. Don't try to correct on the screen. Print it out, take it away from the computer and correct the hard copy.
4. Read the passage out loud. Remember, you have written it to take an idea from your head to someone else's. Test it! Use small pauses where you have a comma, larger ones where you have a period. See if it sounds right. We're not necessarily talking about schoolroom-perfect punctuation here (well, mostly - sometimes it's critical). Remember the only purpose of punctuation is to help get that message to the other person. Reading out loud will also help you spot missing or doubled words.
5. Correct it by proofing backwards. Read each word from last to first to check spelling. That way you won't miss a word because you got carried away by your own message!
6. Never correct your work immediately after you have written it.
7. Avoid proofreading your own work, if you can. The same mental processes which went into composition are the ones you will use to correct your work.
8. Check and double check any company names, telephone numbers or other factual information. Many advertising pieces have been written with an incorrect contact telephone number. That WILL cost you money!
9. When you think you've finished, run the spell checker again to make sure you haven't slipped another error in.
10. Last of all, seriously consider hiring a proofreader. I happen to believe that it's almost true (not quite, but almost) that good proofreaders are naturals. You either have it or you don't. My husband is a smart cookie, but can't proofread to save his life! If you know you're a lousy proofreader, save yourself some pain and find someone who can do the job properly.

Remember that it's all about getting an idea from YOUR head into SOMEONE ELSE'S head.

Without the friction, the flies and the bad notes!

Good Luck!

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Nona Langley is a professional proofreader and owner of Guaranteed Proofreading Services. Authors from around the world have used Nona's services to polish and make presentable their articles, letters and information products. For more information on proofreading services or how proofreading can improve your written documents and help you increase profitability visit [">http://www.proofreadingservices.com](http://www.proofreadingservices.com)  
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