

Proofreading 101

By Tanja Rosteck

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PROOFREADING 101

While proofreading isn't the most enjoyable part of writing, it's the most important. A document full of typos, grammatical glitches, and glaring errors reflects badly on your business and can create more problems than it solves.

Don't rely on the spell-checker, as it can't catch certain types of errors. It's best to proofread the document with your own eyes - and the eyes of a friend or professional editor too, if possible.

Proofreading doesn't have to be a long, tedious process - it's quick and easy if you know how to do it right. Here are some tips for proofreading effectively.

* Wait 12 to 24 hours before proofreading.

Don't proofread immediately after writing. Put some distance between you and your words before checking them over. Otherwise, you'll unconsciously be proofreading your ideas rather than what's actually written on the page.

* Proofread from a printout, not the screen.

You want to focus on the text, not the page design or a fancy layout, so it's a good idea to proofread from a printout. This is extra-important when the document uses text effects or different fonts that may distract you from noticing details. Just circle the errors on the printout as you go, then use it as a guide afterwards to make any necessary corrections.

* Keep your calculator handy.

It may seem redundant and tedious to re-calculate the math in a document, especially if you use automatic formulas, but imagine if your proposal for a client was missing a zero or two in the cost estimate! Take time to double-check all numbers, especially within tables. And don't forget dates - programs such as Microsoft Word might be updating the dates automatically without you

noticing.

* Scan for one thing at a time.

There are so many different types of errors to look for that scanning for all of them at once just isn't effective. Professional proofreaders will do several passes through a document, each for a specific problem. Try scanning the document first for spelling typos, then go over it again to check numbers and dates, then once more to find grammatical errors and incorrect sentence structure.

* Proofread in a quiet space.

Noisy offices and constant interruptions will distract you from the task at hand. Remember, proofreading is detail-intensive work! The less focused you are, the greater your chances of missing errors. Save proofreading for early in the workday or at the very end, when noise and other distractions are at a minimum. Ensure you're relaxed and able to dedicate enough time to the task.

* Go slowly and trust your instincts.

This is where proofreading becomes a Zen activity! Don't zoom through the text like you already know what it says - pretend you are reading it for the first time. Read each sentence slowly. If your eye is suddenly drawn to something on the page, there's a good chance there's something amiss but your brain hasn't zeroed in to it yet, so take the time to double-check the sentence or paragraph.

Enlisting the help of a professional is a good idea - a fresh perspective is always useful, especially if the document has gone through several edits and/or rewrites. Professional editors can proofread efficiently, and can even suggest ways to improve readability and style. At the very least, have a colleague or friend proofread your work to catch things you may have missed.

The document may be the only link a customer has to your business - so make that impression count!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Tanja Rosteck is the owner of Words4Nerds, providing professional and affordable online help, user manuals, installation guides, web content, and editing services to small software businesses.

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