

Proofreading

Proofreading is not the same as reading. When you read, the goal is to understand and/or enjoy the information that is presented to you. In contrast, the goal of proofreading is to read with the purpose of discovering errors in the text. When you read, you are not preoccupied with verb tenses or subject-verb agreement. However, when you proofread, you want to assume that every space, letter, word, and punctuation mark could potentially contain a mistake.

This handout provides you with techniques to proofread. While there are many methods, all of them have the same goal: to help you look at your work carefully and have your brain on full alert, prepared to catch each mistake.

Preparing to Proofread

Successful proofreading does not begin the moment your eyes start combing through your sentences. Successful proofreading begins before you start reading your paper: the setting you proofread in and the duration of time you give yourself are both essential to your success.

Setting

Proofread in a quiet place where you can concentrate. If you cannot find a quiet place, then plug in earphones to an iPod, phone, or computer, and listen to music that will help you focus. If you go to YouTube and search for “study music,” you will find numerous “study tracks” you can listen to.

Time

Do not proofread directly after completing your paper. Give yourself at least an hour if not a day before you begin proofreading. The more time you spend away from the paper, the more you will see it clearly and objectively when you return.

Proofreading on a Hard Copy

Read Out Loud

By hearing the words you have written, you engage the text with not one but two senses, and your likelihood of catching more mistakes increases.



Point at Every Word with your Pen/Pencil

Your brain wants to assume that what you say or think is the equivalent to what you have typed or written. However, this is not necessarily the case. By reading out loud and pointing at every word, you will have a better chance of seeing and hearing discrepancies between what you meant and what is on your paper.

Read from the Bottom to the Top

Start with the last sentence of the piece you have written and then move up, sentence by sentence, to the first sentence. Reading in reverse order, you will see each sentence in isolation and be able to make more corrections. The example below numbers sentences from the bottom to the top; to proofread, you should start with sentence one, and then move up to sentence three.

Example of Reading from the Bottom to the Top

3) A shortage in parking garages ultimately harms students who also have jobs, as they are not guaranteed a free parking space and thus not guaranteed to make it to their class on time after leaving work. 2) Therefore, students who do not have the option of arriving to school early should be given leniency. 1) Leniency should exist during the first few months of the fall semester when SJSU parking garages are particularly full.

Cover Lines

As you proofread, cover the lines that you are not looking at with a white sheet of paper. This strategy isolates the number of words you focus on so that you are less distracted by the other sentences in the text.

Proofreading on a Screen

Enlarge the Font Size

If you proofread on a screen, enlarge the font size of the sentence you are looking at so even the punctuation is clearly visible to you.

Example of Enlarging the Font

A shortage in parking garages ultimately harms students who also have jobs, as they are not guaranteed a free parking space and thus not guaranteed to make it to their class on time after leaving work. **Therefore, students who do not have the option of arriving to school early should be given leniency.** Leniency should exist during the first few months of the fall semester when SJSU parking garages are particularly full.

Highlight Each Sentence

Highlight each sentence as you read it. By highlighting each sentence, you focus on what is in front of you, and you are not distracted by the other sentences in your paper.

Example of Highlighting a Sentence

A shortage in parking garages ultimately harms students who also have jobs, as they are not guaranteed a free parking space and thus not guaranteed to make it to their class on time after leaving work. Therefore, students who do not have the option of arriving to school early should be given leniency. Leniency should exist at least during the first few months of the fall semester when SJSU parking garages are particularly full.

Activity 1: Proofread a Paragraph

Using the tools provided, proofread the paragraph below and fix the errors.

A shortage in parking garages ultimately harm students who also has a jobs, as they not guaranteed the free parking space and thus not guaranteed to make it to their class on time after leaving work. Therefore, students who does not has the option of arriving on school early should be given leniency, at least during a first few months of the fall semester when SJSU parking garages are particularly full. This leniency would consist of 10 minute grace period, meaning they could arrive to class up to 10 minutes late without their grade being adversely affected.

Answer Key for Activity 1

A shortage in parking garages ultimately **harms** students who also **have jobs**, as they **are** not guaranteed **a** free parking space and thus not guaranteed to make it to their class on time after leaving work. Therefore, **students who do not have** the option of arriving **at** school early should be given leniency, at least during **the** first few months of the fall semester when SJSU parking garages are particularly full. This leniency would consist of **a 10-minute** grace period, meaning they could arrive to class up to 10 minutes late without their grade being adversely affected.

Activity 2: Track Your Progress

While the proofreading methods provided in this handout can help equip many students with valuable proofreading techniques, not every student struggles with the same types of grammatical errors. One key aspect of proofreading successfully is to know your own weaknesses.

The progress log on the next page will help you categorize your consistent errors across several assignments. The table will help you to log grammar mistakes, the number of mistakes, the assignment that you worked on, and the date of the assignment.

For each paper, include the assignment number and the date, and then tally each mistake according to its category. The goal is to know which particular errors to watch for and ultimately to observe your progress. Feel free to add grammatical categories (as needed) to the log.

Model Progress Log

<u>Grammatical Category</u>	<u>Assignment:</u>	<u>Assignment:</u>	<u>Assignment:</u>	<u>Assignment:</u>
	<u>Date:</u>	<u>Date:</u>	<u>Date:</u>	<u>Date:</u>
Articles (a/an/the)				
Subject-Verb Agreement				
Verb Tenses				
Comma Splice				
Fused Sentences				
Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement				
Prepositions				
Contractions				
Apostrophes				
Active/Passive Voice				
Spelling				

References

Carduner, Jessie. "Teaching Proofreading Skills as a Means of Reducing Composition Errors."

Language Learning Journals. Routledge, Dec. 2007. Web. 10 Oct. 2014.

Madraso, Jan. "Proofreading: The Skill We've Neglected to Teach." *The English Journal*.

National Council of Teachers of English, Feb. 1993. Web. 12 Oct. 2014.