

## Proofreading tips

- Always proof on paper. If you can't, then you'll need to read it more times, with at least two word-by-word reads.
- Put your finger on the paper when doing a word-by-word read, moving it along to block out the word after the one you're reading. That'll help you focus on each word. If you're proofing on a screen, then force yourself to focus on each word separately as you read.
- Some people put a ruler underneath the copy to force them to focus only on one line at a time (rather than skipping ahead). This is especially useful when comparison proofing (comparing one proof to another).
- If you are proofing on screen, then copy and paste the text into a new document – and change the font. That will trick your mind into seeing the copy in a new way, which will help you spot mistakes.
- Avoid distractions. Find a quiet room or put on noise-cancelling headphones. If you proof on paper, then make sure you're away from your computer.
- Read the copy out loud (or verbalise it in your head). Does it sound natural? If not, you need to rewrite it.
- Follow the logic of each sentence, not the writer's intent. To do this, some people suggest reading backwards – although I don't. Instead, take the time to split the sentence up into its components. Identify the subject, the verb and the key point. Identify any adjectives, and make sure they're modifying what they're meant to.

Breaking up a sentence into its components takes time at first, but the more you do it, the faster it becomes.

- Holding the proof at arm's length will help you see layout issues such as differing font sizes, extra spaces, missing captions, misaligned paragraphs and bullet points.

When working on screen, such as in Word, zoom out so you can see multiple pages at once.

- Use spell check – but never rely on it (especially as it won't understand the meaning or context of words. For example, it won't have a problem with “grate” even if you meant to say “great”.)

## Where mistakes are usually found

- Captions.
- Headlines.
- Pull quotes.
- Anything entered at the last minute (every time you make a change, you introduce the possibility of adding a new mistake).
- Numbers (especially percentages).
- Names.
- Acronyms (these are often misspelt).
- URL and email addresses.
- If you find one mistake, you'll often find others nearby in a cluster.

If you see a word that's repeatedly spelt in an unusual way, then it might be the correct spelling – yet again, double check.

Before making a correction, stop and think: why was this originally written like this? It's common to change copy only to find that it was right in the first place, or that you've changed the meaning by accident.

Typical mistakes include:

- punctuation, such as commas in the wrong place
- confusing copy – such as a pronoun that could refer to the wrong person, or a sentence that could be construed in different ways
- sentences that are too long.