Proofreading Strategies

Keep clam and proofread.

Proofreading is one of the final stages of the writing process. It is the process of carefully checking an assignment to look for spelling, grammar, and formatting errors. Students should save enough time before an assignment is due to proofread carefully. If an assignment is submitted with errors, it damages the student’s credibility (believability and trustworthiness) as a writer.

Proofreading Strategies:

1. Give yourself some distance from your assignment. Once you’ve created a draft you’re happy with, leave the draft alone for a few hours (or better yet, a full day) before proofreading.
2. Don’t rely on spell checkers. They may miss words that are used incorrectly, even if they are real words. For example, it will mark the word “thought” as correct even if the writer meant “though.”
3. Use your resources, such as dictionaries and handbooks. They can help you find the correct spelling or identify grammar errors.
4. Use your computer’s search function to find errors that you know you make. For example, if you struggle with there/they’re/their, you can search each of those words to check that you’ve used them correctly.
5. Read your assignment out loud, or ask a friend to read it to you. Listen carefully for errors or awkward-sounding sentences.
6. Print out your assignment. Often, it is easier to find errors on a printed copy of the work.
7. Read with a ruler or piece of paper under each line of text. This will force your eyes to slow down and focus on one line at a time.
8. Read the assignment backwards, sentence by sentence. This requires you to focus on the spelling and grammar of one sentence at a time.
9. Check for mistakes you know you make. If you struggle with comma splices, for example, read the assignment looking specifically for comma splices.
10. Review your citations to make sure they are correct. If you need additional help or materials on citation, visit The Learning Center! You can also scan the QR code on the right to access TLC handouts, including citation handouts.
11. Double check facts, figures, dates, and quotes to make sure they are correct.
12. Be sure your tone is academically appropriate. Most college instructors look for a degree of formality from their students. A quick way to make your writing more formal is to remove the pronouns “you” and “I” as well as contractions like “can’t” or “we’re.”
13. Be prepared to proofread more than once. Look for one or two types of problems at a time.

Why should you care about proofreading? Here is what happens when people don’t proofread...

- They embarrass themselves. An educational software company printed an ad that read, “So fun, they won’t even know their learning.”
- They may not get a job. Employers will often choose not to interview candidates with errors on their resumes.
- Their business can lose money. For example, an Italian airline accidentally priced a flight from Toronto to Cyprus at $39, not $3,900. The airline lost $7.72 million due to their error.