



Proofreading: The Last Step That Matters

In 2006, Ottawa County, Michigan, had to reprint about 170,000 election ballots. The estimated cost was \$40,000. The problem? In one place, the word *public* was missing its **L**. Somehow, *pubic* had survived several rounds of proofreading.

It is funny—unless you are paying the printing bill. Most of our mistakes cost less, but they can still distract a reader from an otherwise strong piece of writing. Proofreading is the last chance to catch them.

Ten ways to proofread more effectively

- 1. Edit before you proofread.** Editing asks whether your ideas, organization, and paragraphs work. Proofreading checks the finished draft for errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, and word choice. If you rewrite a paragraph, proofread it again.
- 2. Run a spelling and grammar check.** These tools catch many mistakes quickly. They may miss a correctly spelled word used in the wrong place, such as *here* instead of *hear*. Consider every suggestion rather than accepting it automatically.
- 3. Choose a format that helps you focus.** Some people catch more errors on paper; others prefer a screen. On paper, place a blank sheet beneath the line you are reading. On screen, zoom in or follow one line at a time with your cursor.
- 4. Step away from the draft.** Even a short break can help you return with fresher eyes. When possible, leave more time between writing and the final check.

5. Budget time for the last pass. A deadline should include time to edit, proofread, make corrections, and check the corrected version. Small changes made at the last minute can introduce new errors.

6. Find a quiet place. Proofreading demands attention to individual words and marks. Silence notifications and give the page your full attention.

7. Make more than one pass. On the first pass, look for missing words and awkward sentences. On the next, check spelling, punctuation, names, and numbers. Separate passes make it easier to notice each kind of error.

8. Read aloud, then read from the end. Reading aloud can expose missing or repeated words. For another pass, start with the last sentence and work toward the first. Changing the order helps you examine each sentence rather than getting carried along by the story.

9. Ask someone else to read it. You know what you meant to write, which can make you see words that are not actually there. A fresh reader may notice what you have read past repeatedly.

10. Learn your usual mistakes. Keep a short list of words and patterns that trip you up. Search for them during your final pass. [Purdue OWL's proofreading guide](#) offers more ways to build a reliable routine.

A careful final read cannot promise perfection. It can, however, spare your reader a distraction—and perhaps spare someone a very expensive reprint.

Proofreader's note: One misspelled word is hiding in this article. Did you catch it?