

Top 5 proof reading errors

So many opportunities are lost because of proof reading errors that have not been picked up and amended before a piece of work is submitted, whether it is an essay or dissertation or a manuscript for publication. For students this can be hugely disappointing, and can mean that marks are lost and the final mark may not necessarily reflect the quality of the paper that has been written in terms of content, argument strength and evidence cited. For a manuscript, it may mean the difference between publication or not.

There are lots of proof reading companies out there that can help you ensure that your work is error free before you submit it. However you may decide that you want to have a go at proof reading your own work rather than asking someone else to do it for you.

Being able to proof read your own work successfully is a good skill to have as you will no doubt find throughout your life that there are documents that you have to proof read; either for work or as part of a further educational course / qualification.

So, what are you looking out for when you start proof reading your piece of work? Below are the top 5 proof reading errors made generally, to help you focus your attention in the correct places:

1. Spelling errors. Words that are often spelt wrong include; there versus their and they're; accept and except, who's and whose, its and it's, affect and effect, then versus than, and of course were versus we're and where.
2. Commas. Knowing when to use commas, when not to use commas and when to use other forms of punctuation can be tricky. Commas should be used to indicate a pause, when joining two parts of a sentence together by using a conjunction such as 'but', when providing additional information about a person or a thing that is not actually relevant to the overall sentence, and to separate items listed in a sentence.
3. Apostrophes. Apostrophes followed by an 'S' are used for single nouns (child's wellbeing, Sarah's handbag, etc), for indefinite pronouns (anyone's, nobody's, etc), and for plural nouns that do not end in an 'S'. Where a plural noun ends in an 'S', use an apostrophe only (the drivers' cars, the companies' accounts, etc)
4. Active and passive verbs. Active verbs are usually preferred as the use of an active verb can make the sentence seem more alive and clear. The example below indicates the difference in the use of an active and a passive verb:

'A decision **was reached** by the committee.' - Passive

'The committee **reached** a decision.' - Active

5. Tense confusion. Shifting or changing the tense of verbs within a sentence can be very confusing to the reader and is often incorrect. It is important to keep tenses

consistent within sentences. The examples below highlight the correct and incorrect use of tenses:

'After he **joined** the Union, Sam **appears** at a rally and **makes** a speech.' – This is incorrect

'After he **joined** the Union, Sam **appeared** at a rally and **made** a speech.' – This is correct

There are lots of other important proof reading errors to look for in your work, including importantly how you use quotation marks. However, as the above examples are areas that often lead to errors in written work, it is a good idea to check the above prior to submission.