

## A Day in the Life of a Proof reader

Working as a proof reader means that no two days are the same! Each day brings different challenges and a varied workload. Working as a proof reader from home means that I have to be disciplined about my time and not let myself be distracted by all those odd jobs around the house! Remember what it was like when you studied at home – everything was cleaner than it had ever been because unless you are disciplined about your time and focus on work, everything else can become more important.

The work of a proof reader is driven by the submissions received. Submissions can vary in length – anything from a few hundred words to thousands of words. The subject matter can also be very varied, from academic essays and thesis to fiction or non-fiction manuscripts, adverts, cover letters, web pages and application forms. Anything really! This variety of subject matter makes the job rewarding and interesting as generally no two submissions are the same.

So, the day starts by getting all other jobs out of the way leaving the way clear to work through submissions. I tend to work at a desk or table as I find I am more focussed and productive this way. Some people find that they can proof read whilst sitting in front of the television – not me. Before you know where you are, snippets of Eastenders or Hollyoaks have slipped into the submission you are working on which is never a good idea!

Of course, there have to be some timeframes to work to for each type of submission and most proof readers tend to equate word count to hours. Therefore, once a submission is received, an estimation of how long it will take is made. I generally work to a rule of 1,000 words requires 20 minutes of proof reading. It is important to have an idea of how long a piece of work will take, not only from a cost perspective, but also to plan your day to ensure that you allocate enough time to each submission and are able to give the client a realistic time for completion.

As a proof reader, my job is to weed out all mistakes in a submission. Proof reading can sometimes be mistaken for copy editing, although technically speaking, these are separate processes. Proofreading is carried out after the page proofs have been prepared by the designer, and, while copy editing errors may still be found, a proof reader is concerned with other elements. They will check all design elements for accuracy and consistency, including headers, page numbering, word breaks, end-of-line breaks, page breaks, cross references, and appropriate placement of tables and artwork.

Concentration is very important when proof reading as any lapse can mean that mistakes are missed. There are a few things I do to maintain my concentration and maintain a high standard of proof reading and I have outlined some of these below:

- Read the piece out loud. This helps alert me to jarring punctuation or sentence constructions. If the piece of work is large, then this may not be plausible and so I read alternate chapters or sections out loud and read the rest 'in my head'.

- Read it backwards! Start at the end of the document and read each sentence, starting with the last sentence and taking it as the first. This removes the notion of 'sense' to the piece, and means that I really take in the words and grammar on the page, as opposed to skim reading the document. It's also funny to read it this way aloud too!

I try to ensure that I finish one piece of work before I start another so that my mind is fresh and focussed only on that submission. Sometimes this is not possible depending on the amount of submissions and deadlines that need to be met. On any given day, I can work through a range of subject matter including children's fiction, ergonomics in radiation, self-help for the mind, body and spirit and flying dolphins! Never a dull moment.

I also enjoy reading for pleasure, but often find it difficult to switch off from my day job and continue to proof read 'out of hours' – an occupational hazard, I suppose!

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