

# Editing and Proofreading

(Taken from Writing Center at UNC: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/editing-and-proofreading/>)

## Is Editing and Proofreading the Same?

Not exactly. Although many people use the terms interchangeably, editing and proofreading are two different stages of the revision process. Both demand close and careful reading, but they focus on different aspects of the writing and employ different techniques.

## Editing

Editing is what you begin doing as soon as you finish your first draft. You reread your draft to see, for example, whether the paper is well-organized, the transitions between paragraphs are smooth, and your evidence really backs up your argument. You can edit on several levels:

- **Content**: Have you done everything the assignment requires? Are the claims you make accurate? If it is required to do so, does your paper make an argument? Are all of your claims consistent?
- **Overall Structure**: Does your paper have an appropriate introduction and conclusion? Is your thesis clearly stated in your introduction? Is it clear how each paragraph in the body of your paper is related to your thesis? Are the paragraphs arranged in a logical sequence?
- **Structure within Paragraphs**: Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence? Does each paragraph stick to one main idea? Are there any extraneous or missing sentences in any of your paragraphs?
- **Clarity**: Have you defined any important terms that might be unclear to your reader? Is the meaning of each sentence clear? Is it clear what each pronoun (i.e. he, she, it, they, etc.) refers to?
- **Style**: Have you used an appropriate tone (formal, informal, persuasive, etc.)? Is your use of gendered language appropriate? Have you varied the length and structure of your sentences? Do you tend to use the passive voice too often?
- **Citations**: Have you appropriately cited quotes, paraphrases, and ideas you go form sources? Are your citations in the correct format?

## **Proofreading**

Proofreading is the final stage of the editing process, focusing on surface errors such as misspellings and mistakes in grammar and punctuation. **You should proofread only after you have finished all of your other editing revisions.**

### **The Proofreading Process:**

- **Don't rely entirely on spelling checkers:** These can be useful tools but they are far from foolproof. Spell checkers have a limited dictionary, so some words that show up as misspelled may really just not be in their memory.
- **Grammar checkers can be even more problematic:** These programs work with a limited number of rules, so they can't identify every error and often make mistakes. They also fail to give thorough explanations to help you understand why a sentence should be revised.
- **Proofread for only one kind of error at a time:** If you try and revise too many things at once, you risk losing focus, and your proofreading will be less effective. It's easier to catch grammar errors if you aren't checking punctuation and spelling at the same time. In addition, some techniques that work well for spotting one kind of mistake won't catch others.
- **Read slowly, and read every word:** Try reading out loud, which forces you to say each word and also lets you hear how the words sound together. When you read silently or too quickly, you may skip over errors or make unconscious corrections.
- **Separate the text into individual sentences:** This is another technique to help you to read every sentence carefully. Simply press the return key after every period so that every line begins a new sentence. Then read each sentence separately, looking for grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors.
- **Circle every punctuation mark:** This forces you to look at each one. As you circle, ask yourself if the punctuation is correct.
- **Proofreading is a learning process:** You're not just looking for errors that you recognize; you're also learning to recognize and correct new errors. This is where handbooks and dictionaries come in. Keep the ones you find helpful close at hand as you proofread.
- **Ignorance may be bliss, but it won't make you a better proofreader:** You'll often find things that don't seem quite right to you, but you may not be quite sure what's wrong either. A word may look like it is misspelled, but the spell checker didn't catch it. If you're unsure about something, look it up.