Proofreading Tips

Proofreading is the final stage of the writing process; you should proofread *only after* you have finished all of your other revisions. When you proofread your written work, you look only for surface errors such as misspellings and mistakes in grammar, word choice, and punctuation. Here are some tips to help you through the process.

Step away from your first draft. Unless you are really under pressure to meet a same-day deadline, take a breather from your writing before you begin to proofread. Something that makes perfect sense to you when you have been writing for a while and are in a hurry to finish your work may not be so clear later.

Set the scene. *Know which medium allows you to proofread most carefully*. Are you someone who does better work at the computer or when you take pen to paper? *Find a quiet place to work*, where you can concentrate and avoid distractions. *Leave yourself enough time for proofreading,* as this will help you to catch errors you might otherwise miss. If possible, *proofread in several short sessions* to help you keep up your concentration. *Always prioritize* your proofreading tasks to be sure that the most important ones are completed on time.

Read aloud. *Read every word out loud, carefully and slowly.* When you read silently or too quickly, you may skip over errors or make unconscious corrections based on your knowledge of what you meant to say. *Try reading with a partner.* Ask someone else to read along with you and help you catch mistakes that you might have overlooked.

Use resources … but don't rely on spelling and grammar checks! Your computer is probably pretty savvy and will catch some errors, but it doesn't know what you mean to say. You can still use spellcheck; just make sure to use other resources as well, such as dictionaries and style handbooks. Otherwise you may discover that there are still errors in your paper, even though there aren't any of those red squiggly lines.

Look for common mistakes first. If you know that you tend to make a certain type of error, such as confusing possessives or misusing semicolons, keep a reference handy and look for spots where those mistakes may be a problem.

Read it again! Once you've checked through your writing once and made the necessary corrections, check through it again to make sure you caught everything. You can also ask a friend to read it if you are unsure of something.

Don't forget about the larger piece. Although correct spelling and grammar are important, don't lose yourself in the details and forget about your larger piece of writing. Do proofread, but remember that your top priority should be your ideas. These two elements can go hand in hand, because sometimes proofreading can help to make your ideas clearer.

Sources Consulted: Tarshis, Barry. *How to be Your Own Best Editor*; the Writing Center at the University of North Carolina; thePerdue OWL; and the Writing Tutorial Services at Indiana University.