

Proofreading

What is proofreading?

Proofreading is an important final step when producing any piece of writing. It involves looking for “surface” errors in a text, often concerning spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Proofreading does *not* include looking for errors in the content and ideas expressed in your writing.

Ideally, you will proofread your work yourself (and advice on how to do this effectively is available via the one-to-one Academic Learning Support service). If you are working on a long piece of text such as a dissertation, or if you are not confident about your written English, you might wish to consider using a proofreader if this is permitted by your academic department.

Who counts as a proofreader?

If someone checks your work for surface errors, they are acting as a proofreader. Typically, this might be a friend or relative with good written English skills, or a commercial (paid) proofreader.

Am I allowed to use a commercial proofreader?

This varies depending on your course and the particular assignment, so you must check with your course tutor or dissertation supervisor. If permission is given, it is advisable to confirm this in writing, e.g. with an email. You might be given specific guidance on what the proofreader is and is not allowed to change in your text.

Can the University help me find a proofreader?

City does not endorse any proofreader.

The Society for Editors and Proofreaders (sfep.org.uk) maintains a publicly searchable database of individuals offering their services as commercial proofreaders. These individuals are broadly ranked by SFEP on the basis of their experience and qualifications; it is suggested that you seek out an individual ranked at the “advanced professional” level. Use of any proofreader found via SFEP is at your own risk.

Is commercial proofreading expensive?

The cost varies. Make sure you clearly agree a charging basis in advance. A fixed fee per 1000 words is a common approach.

At what stage of the writing process should I use a proofreader?

Proofreading must be the final stage of the writing process, so wait until you have completed the text before sending it to the proofreader.

How should the proofreader work with my text?

It is important that the proofreader annotates your work in such a way that you can see each change that is being proposed and choose whether to accept it or not. Microsoft Word offers functionality to enable a text to be annotated in this way. Ultimately, it is your piece of work, and it is up to you decide whether to accept all, or any, of the proofreader's suggested changes. Leave yourself plenty of time to review the suggested changes one by one.

Authorship of the finished work must be yours alone. It is advisable to keep a copy of the text as it was before the proofreader worked on it; this enables you to show that any changes they have proposed are surface-level changes only (e.g. spelling, punctuation, grammar).

What is the proofreader allowed to do?

The proofreader can identify and suggest corrections for:

- typing mistakes (known as "typos")
- spelling errors
- grammar errors, e.g. subject-verb agreement, comma splicing, etc.
- accidentally repeated words or obviously missed out words
- mistakes / inconsistencies in layout / formatting (e.g. font size, line spacing)
- mistakes / inconsistencies in presentation of citations
- inconsistencies with your academic department's style rules (where available)
- other errors which can be considered surface errors
- particularly long or difficult-to-follow sentences
- ambiguous sentences

What is the proofreader *not* allowed to do?

The proofreader must not:

- change the meaning of any sentence or section
- change the order of points, sentences or paragraphs
- comment on, alter or supplement the content or ideas of the text
- make corrections to calculations or facts
- alter an argument or correct an illogicality
- translate text into English from another language
- check for plagiarism

All work submitted as part of your programme must be your own work. Any use of a proofreader for any of the above points would be categorised as academic misconduct, which can result in a module mark of zero. This can have additional implications for students on programmes with professional registration.

Should I declare in the work that it has been proofread by a third party?

Yes, this is good practice. Your assignment guidelines might suggest a suitable place to do this, such as the Acknowledgments section of your work.

Is there software that can proofread for me?

Error correction apps such as [Grammarly](#) and [ProWritingAid](#) are available and can be helpful to some extent. Generally, they are not as reliable as using a skilled human proofreader. Effective use of a proofreading app usually entails paying a subscription, with free versions/trials typically offering only restricted functionality.

More advice from Academic Learning Support

For further study skills advice, and information on disability and specific learning differences such as dyslexia, enrol on the Learning Success Moodle page. Log into Moodle, go to tiny.cc/learningsuccess, and scroll down to click the enrol button.

To make an appointment for one-to-one study skills support:

- go to the Learning Success reception in the Student Centre (2nd floor, University Building), or
- call us on 0207 040 0246