Editing and Proofreading

What this handout is about

This handout provides some tips and strategies for revising your writing. To give you a chance to practice proofreading, we have left seven errors (three spelling

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? (See our handout on paragraph development.)

Clarity

Have you defined any important terms that might be unclear to your reader? Is the meaning of each sentence clear? (One way to answer this question is to read your paper one sentence at a time, starting at the end and working backwards so that you will not unconsciously fill in content from previous sentences.) Is it clear what each pronoun (he, she, it, they, which, who, this, etc.) refers to? Have you chosen the

content and wording of your paper. Keep an eye out for patterns of error; knowing what kinds of problems you tend to have will be helpful, especially if you are editing a large document like a thesis or dissertation. Once you have identified a pattern, you can develop techniques for spotting and correcting future instances of that pattern. For example, if you notice that you often discuss several distinct topics in each paragraph, you can go through your paper and underline the key words in each paragraph, then break the paragraphs up so that each one focuses on just one main idea.

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.

Why proofread? It's the content that really matters, right?

Content is important. But like it or not, the way a paper looks affects the way others judge it. When you've worked hard to develop and present your ideas, you don't want careless errors distracting your reader from what you have to say. It's worth paying attention to the details that help you to make a good impression.

an early draft, you don't want to be bothered with thinking about punctuation, grammar, and spelling. If your worrying about the spelling of a word or the placement of a comma, you're not focusing on the more important task of developing and connecting ideas.

The proofreading process

You probably already use some of the strategies discussed below. Experiment with different tactics until you find a system that works well for you. The important thing is to make the q 1 0 0 -pi1a find a system thaic 60 (e notiscso10 (em tha)yThe pr)u ca

practice a systematic strategy. You'll learn to identify the specific areas of your own writing that need careful attention, and knowing that you have a sound method for finding errors will help you to focus more on developing your ideas while you are drafting the paper.

Think you've got it?

Then give it a try, if you haven't already! This handout contains seven errors our proofreader should have caught: three spelling errors, two punctuation errors, and two grammatical errors. Try to find them, and then check a version of this page with the errors marked in red to see if you're a proofreading star.

Works consulted

We consulted these works while writing this handout. This is not a comprehensive list of resources on the handout's topic, and we encourage you to do your own research to find the latest publications on this topic. Please do not use this list as a model for the format of your own reference list, as it may not match the citation style you are using. For guidance on formatting citations, please see the UNC Libraries citation tutorial.

Especially for non-native speakers of English:

Ascher, Allen. *Think about Editing: An ESL Guide for the Harbrace Handbooks.* Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2006.

Lane, Janet, and Ellen Lange. *Writing Clearly: Grammar for Editing.* 3rd ed. Boston: Heinle ELT, 2011.

For everyone:

Einsohn, Amy. *The Copyeditor's Handbook: A Guide for Book Publishing and Corporate Communications.* 3rd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

Lanham, Richard A. *Revising Prose.* 5th ed. New York: Longman, 2006.

Tarshis, Barry. *How to Be Your Own Best Editor: The Toolkit for Everyone Who Writes.* New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998.

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