

Editing and Proofreading

Re-read your paper frequently as you write and revise. This will help you be certain you say what you intend.

Be concise. ~~Remove words which aren't necessary.~~ Eliminate redundancy. ~~Cut repetition.~~

Create editing and proofreading checklists for yourself which have the particular mistakes that you make when you're writing. Such a list will help you clean up papers before turning them in, and over time, help you develop better writing habits.

Play with sentence length. Use short sentences. Combine short sentences to form long ones. In addition to using "and" and "but" to connect sentences, use words like: which, that, although, therefore, in spite of, because of, whenever... Create rhythms with short or long sentences.

Read a sentence and ask yourself: Does it sound right? Can I say it more precisely? Can I say it more concisely?

Re-read your writing, especially aloud. When we read out loud we find errors we skim over silently. (Repetition can be intentional. Here it emphasizes the value of re-reading.)

BackWords Guide to Proofreading

The key to the exercise is to shift focus from content and meaning to mechanics. That is achieved, primarily, by reading each word or sentence out of context.

1. To find misspelled words, read the text out loud backwards one word at a time. Underline any word you aren't certain is spelled correctly.
2. To catch possible mispunctuation, especially run-ons and fragments, read the text aloud one sentence at a time beginning from the end of the text and working forward. When the punctuation interferes with understanding the sentence, or when you stumble or reread a sentence, mark it in the margin. You could correct it now, but don't let that distract you from checking all of the other sentences in the paper.
3. To identify homonyms, you first need a list of them and the best list is one you create yourself of the ones that you occasionally get wrong. Look for the words in your list by reading the text one word at a time backwards. If you run into homonyms that aren't on your list, underline those too if you're uncertain you know which is witch. (So if you don't recognize the second "witch" as wrong in the last sentence, it should be on your list. Happy Halloween!)
4. To catch possible grammatical problems, read the paper aloud to someone else one sentence at a time from the end to the beginning. If a sentence sounds "awkward" or "wrong" to the listener's ear, mark it to check later.

Writers re-read their work frequently. Be a writer, re-read your work forward to back often. Then, before turning a paper in, use these back to front reading strategies to find the surface errors.