Proofreading Tips

Focus on content:

When you proofread a paper, you should not focus simply on grammar and mechanics. You must first pay close attention to the content, making sure that your sentences are on topic, your ideas are supported, and your thoughts are clearly developed. You must also examine the organization of your paper to make sure there is a logical progression of ideas from one paragraph to the next. Think about the following questions:

- Does the paper answer the question or topic assignment?
- Do transitional words or phrases link ideas both between and within body paragraphs?
- Are all claims and ideas supported with textual evidence or sufficient explanation and discussion?

The tips listed above are actually tips for revising, not proofreading, but rewriting and revision must take place before real proofreading can begin.

Edit for grammar and mechanics:

Once you have completed your content revisions, don't attempt to proofread for every type of grammatical or mechanical error at the same time. It's a good idea to start by making a personal proofreading checklist of your most common errors. That checklist will help you to identify problem areas in the paper you are currently working on. Let's say, for example, that you are concerned about sentence fragments, comma usage, and subject-verb agreement. You might want to list those things at the top of your paper and then read the paper three times, focusing on one kind of error with each reading.

After combing through the paper and straightening out your most common errors, allot yourself enough time to read the entire paper AS A WHOLE before submitting the final draft. Here are some reading suggestions:

- Proofread a printed copy of your paper rather than attempt to edit thoroughly from the computer screen.
- Read the paper aloud, very slowly, and distinctly pronounce exactly what you see.
- Place a ruler or a blank sheet or paper under each line as you read it.
- Read the essay backward, end to beginning, one sentence at a time, so that you examine each sentence as a separate unit. Doing this will force your eye to look at every word, number, symbol, etc. Reading this way feels funny at first, but it works.
- Read aloud to yourself or a friend, or read into a tape recorder and play it back. Listen for the rhythm of your writing.

Additional tips:

- Circle all suspected spelling errors before looking up words in the dictionary.
- Check to see that your punctuation symbols—especially commas, semicolons, periods, and quotation marks—are in the right places.
- Double-check your paper’s citations and make sure that everything has been documented according to the academic style stipulated by your professor. An accidental plagiarism can have serious consequences.
- Examine the formatting of your paper and ascertain that it has a clean and professional appearance.

Armstrong Atlantic State University Writing Center