Proofreading effectively

Your written work may be interesting and well structured, yet it may still make a bad impression and lose marks because of poor proofreading.

1. **Print it off** - it's much more difficult to read onscreen.
2. **Leave it a day** - it's easier to read critically when it's not so fresh in your mind.
3. **Read aloud** - small errors of expression and punctuation are more likely to become obvious if you read aloud.
4. **Punctuate your reading** - put pauses in for punctuation, timed differently for different punctuation marks - so take a breath for commas, come to a halt for full stops. This is a good way to see if your sentences are too long or too short.
5. **Take it slowly** - first read each sentence in a paragraph one at a time to make sure each makes sense. Then read the whole paragraph. Finally, when you've read all the paragraphs, read the whole essay through.
6. **Take care with cut and paste** - if you decide to move things about, don't forget to check the whole sentence again afterwards to make sure all the tenses, genders and plurals agree.
7. **Learn punctuation rules** - make sure you know how to use commas, apostrophes, colons and semi-colons. For more on this, see our guide to Punctuation.
8. **Check your referencing -** check that all your citations in the text appear in the reference list. See your course handbook for the preferred referencing style.
9. **Get another view** - ask a friend to read through your work. Offer to do the same for them. Another pair of eyes will be fresher.
10. **Use your feedback** - always read and learn from your academic feedback. Use it to make a list of the things you often get wrong. Look out for these especially. They should start to disappear as you get used to doing them right.

For more on this and other aspects of academic study, see our website at
www.reading.ac.uk/studyadvice

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Writing style and proofreading

Academic writing 3

This guide produced covers how to write in a formal style for academic work and how to proofread your work to eliminate mistakes. It includes advice on:

- Writing formally
- Writing concisely
- Writing with a purpose
- Proofreading effectively

As different subjects have their own conventions, refer to programme handbooks for specialist guidance. You can also look at publications, such as research journals, in your area to see their writing style.

Writing formally

To maintain a formal style there are various colloquialisms and shortened forms to avoid.

Think b4 u rite! :)

In our everyday lives we are used to communicating by writing texts, emails and notes. These have their own conventions, such as using abbreviations ("txt"), using symbols (☺), figures (4 rather than four) and not writing in sentences. When writing formal essays and reports we have to take extra care that our texting and emailing habits do not creep in by accident.

- **Avoid shortened forms**

  Shouldn't, won't, it's instead of it is.
- **Avoid popular phrases or clichés**

  At the end of the day; in a nutshell; when it comes to the crunch, instead replace with: Finally, in summary, in a crisis.
- **Avoid casual everyday words**

  Really, okay, maybe.

Write out abbreviations and acronyms in full the first time you use them for example:

- First mention: "An article in the American Journal of Philology (AJPh) reported..."

- Subsequent mention: "Writing in the AJPh, Brown concluded that..."

"This is of quintessential preponderance…"

Do not be tempted to use complex language or expressions that are not your own, just to make your writing appear "academic".

Use straightforward language. Your reader needs to understand the information or ideas that you are conveying.

Writing concisely

Communicate succinctly without losing vital information or meaning. It is often easier to write fluently in your first draft, and then edit out unnecessary words and phrases.

Some editing tips to reduce word-count:

Go through a paragraph that you have written and cross out any words, or phrases or even a sentence that may be unnecessary. (Or 'grey it out' – change the text colour of the words you might remove to light grey.)

Read it again to see if you have lost anything essential to the information or meaning; if you have not, then delete it permanently.

Replace phrases with single words meaning the same:
"The researcher wanted to find out" becomes "The researcher enquired"

Some academic writing, such as scientific research methodology, needs to be precise. A reader may need to have all the information required to understand the exact conditions of a scientific study and to replicate it.

Avoid using non-quantifiable descriptions, such as:
- "The company's production rate was high." – Instead specify how high, "The company produced 16,000 units per week."
- "The wind was strong." – How strong? "The wind measured 6 on the Beaufort scale."

Use technical terms correctly. Don't use terms without fully understanding their meaning. Some common everyday terms have a very specific meaning in academic subjects, for example, "The results are significant" – do you mean "important" or do you mean "statistically significant"? If it is the correct and accurate term, use it – don't try to find synonyms or alternatives just to add variety to your writing.

Writing with a purpose

Academic writing has a purpose. It may provide background information, the results of other peoples' research, a critique of other peoples' research, your own research findings, your own ideas based on academic research conducted by others, etc. It may be a combination of a few of these.

- Decide on your purpose and what you intend to convey. If there is a brief follow it. If there is a given question, make sure that you answer what has been asked.
- Decide on the audience for whom you are writing. If you are writing a university assignment, pretend that you are writing for an intelligent colleague from a related academic field, rather than for your professor who knows the subject very well.

For most subject areas the writing is expected to be objective. For this the first person (I, we, me, my) should be avoided.

So "I analysed the findings" becomes "The findings were analysed"

However, writing passively isn't always appropriate. For instance, if you are asked to write a reflective piece, you will need to refer to your own actions and experiences. The important thing is to consider the purpose of your writing - that will help you to decide how to write it.

The Academic Phrasebank gives good examples of phrases that can be used in academic writing: www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/