

# How to proofread

## in a digital age

### 1. Print out and read aloud

The first rule of the digital age is to understand when it's best not to be digital. There's something about looking at paper that helps focus the proofreading mind. It's almost always a good idea to print out a copy of your paper or assignment in order to proofread it. Whether in hard copy or on screen, it's always a good idea to read aloud any text before submission. Reading aloud slows you down and enables you to hear mistakes, even if you cannot always explain why they are problematic.

### 2. Use all of your "checks"

Every decent word processing software program offers a spell check option, but it only helps if you actually use it. Even more important, spellchecking is only the first step. You also need to check grammar, facts, and sources too. Here is where Googling offers such a useful tool in the digital age. You can look up grammar rules or basic fact questions with exceptional speed in this era of powerful search engines. You can also obtain results with fantastic accuracy and reliability if you learn how to swiftly search the so-called "deep web," using sources such as Google Books or subscription databases to help identify online versions of peer-reviewed sources that can help answer any tricky last-minute questions.

### 3. Search and visualize your word choices

One of the key goals of good proofreading is to identify and eliminate unnecessary repetitions. Everybody is prone to repeat certain words, phrases or types of sentence structures. Use the full text search capacity of your computer to help weed out your pet phrases. Sometimes it's even worth the effort to cut and past your entire text into a word cloud engine and see which words you have employed most frequently (and probably too frequently). Searching your text is also a great way to reduce passive voice (search for "was" or "were") or to cut down on clunky adverbs (search "ly"). Of course, not all passive constructions and adverbs are bad, but isolating them will allow you to decide for yourself if you've overdone anything.

### 4. Re-read the instructions

There is nothing really digital about this last bit of advice, but it's especially important in our fast-paced age. Make sure before you submit anything, that you've addressed every aspect of the assignment guidelines. Once you're absolutely sure of that, then yes, please, go ahead and click "send."