

# PROOFREADING Is No Fun

In fact, it's a major bummer. But if you don't want all the hard work you've put into your report, resume or paper to go to waste, you'll have to do it anyway. If you do it right, it will take a lot longer than you think it's going to, and you'll have to read your work *very, very, slowly*, as slowly as molasses in January running uphill. You won't want to do it, but your work won't get any respect if you don't. Here are some suggestions to help you do a good job.

- Read your paper aloud and listen carefully to each word. This might make you feel dumb, but it really does work. Use a pencil to point to every word as you read. Think about what you are reading. Does it make sense? If you have problems reading a sentence because it is awkward or confusing, rewrite it.
- Pretend you didn't write what you are reading, that you are hearing it for the very first time, and know nothing about the subject.
- You can't check for everything at once. You'll need to read your work a number of times, checking for different things.
- Read through once for misspellings and dropped words and then check below for additional things to check.

## Run on sentences and sentence fragments

- Check each sentence to make sure it has a subject, a verb, and is a complete thought.
- Have you run two sentences together incorrectly? Should the sentence really be divided into two?
- Skim the text, stopping at every comma; if there is a complete sentence on each side of it, that is a comma splice and you should substitute a period or semicolon for the comma.

## Apostrophes

- Skim the text, stopping on at words that end in "s." Think about whether each "s" word needs an apostrophe.
- Anytime an "s" word indicates ownership, it needs an apostrophe, e.g., "Jim's hat," "several years' work."
- *There is one exception to this rule.* When you use "its" to indicate ownership, do not use an apostrophe, e.g., "The college changed its admission policy." Do not use an apostrophe with a possessive "its." (*And put the period inside the quote mark!*)

## Punctuation

Circle each comma, period, colon and semicolon. Ask yourself "Why does this piece of punctuation belong here?"

## Subject-Verb Agreement

Check every subject and verb to make sure that if you have used a singular subject, you have also used a singular verb. Likewise, a plural subject needs a plural verb.

## Tenses

- Have you incorrectly jumped about in different tenses?
- Have you used the correct form of the verb to express the tense you want?

## Quotation Marks

- Did you remember to place exact quotes within quotation marks?
- Did you place all periods and commas inside the quotation marks? This is a tough one because it is counter-intuitive. Just remember, *no matter what*, commas and periods go *inside* quote marks. And semicolons and colons go outside of quote marks.

## Frequently confused words:

Check to make sure you aren't using the wrong word:

*to* or *too* or *to*

*their* or *there* or *they're* (they are)

*here* or *hear*

*your* or *you're* (you are)

*then* or *than*

*affect* or *effect* (check a dictionary for the difference)

Here's an example of a sentence that could be very confusing if you weren't careful:

*They're* going over *there* to get *their* ball.

## A Word on Spell Checkers

The spell checkers in word processing programs are wonderful things, but you can't count on them to find every error. Your work needs the human touch – yours!

One big error they overlook are words that are spelled correctly – but in the wrong place, like "from" instead of "form"; this is why you need to read each word *v e r y, v e r y* slowly.