

HOW TO PROOFREAD

Lesson Objective

In this lesson, you will learn some useful tips for peer editing and proofreading. You'll also learn to spot some common English errors.

Did you know...

It is difficult to proofread your own writing. You may not notice your mistakes and typos because your brain tricks you into seeing what you think you wrote. When you proofread your own work, do it at least a day after you finish your final copy.

Warm-Up

A. Writing

Get a blank piece of paper and freewrite about the difference between mistakes and errors. Are they the same thing? Are they different? Don't just think about mistakes and errors in terms of English learning. Think about mistakes and errors in your everyday life. Then discuss these questions with a partner or your classmates.

1. In your opinion, what is the difference between a mistake and an error?
2. How can you prevent yourself from repeating a writing error over and over?
3. Why is it important to make mistakes and errors in life?

B. Vocabulary Preview

Match these words to their correct definitions.

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| _____ 1. proofread | a) an incomplete sentence (without an independent clause) |
| _____ 2. peer edit | b) to check the writing of a classmate or friend |
| _____ 3. typo | c) to read through a final copy and check for mistakes |
| _____ 4. revisions | d) comments (positive or negative) |
| _____ 5. feedback | e) methodically going through a document to check for problems |
| _____ 6. line editing | f) a typing mistake, often made subconsciously |
| _____ 7. draft | g) the incorrect use of a comma to separate two complete thoughts |
| _____ 8. sentence fragment | h) one of two (or more) versions of a document |
| _____ 9. comma splice | i) words that sound the same but have different meanings or spellings |
| _____ 10. homophones | j) changes made to a draft |

Common Writing Errors and Mistakes

Here are some common writing errors to watch out for when you are peer editing at the word and sentence level.

A. Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence that does not contain an independent clause. An independent clause must have a subject and a verb. It also must be able to stand on its own.

Task 2

Can you correct these sentence fragments?
Rewrite the sentences in your notebook.

1. In Canada, where thousands of lakes.
2. Some of the students working through the night.
3. Even though we got the car fixed before our trip.
4. Leaving the country when she had the flu.
5. Which is why we called the police.

B. Apostrophe Errors

Watch out for the tricky apostrophe! Writers often omit an apostrophe where one is needed, or add one when one is not needed. It may even be a good idea to investigate each apostrophe in a piece of writing to see if it was used properly.

Task 3

Can you correct these common apostrophe errors?
Rewrite the sentences in your notebook.

1. The cat ate it's food quickly.
2. Its going to be a busy work week.
3. My sister fly's here on Wednesday.
4. My parent's aren't coming to the concert.
5. Her fathers friend didn't enjoy the party.

C. Subject-Verb Agreement

In English, the subject in a sentence must agree with the verb. A singular subject (boy) takes a singular verb (eats). E.g., *The boy eats pizza*. This is simple when a singular subject is right beside the verb. It gets a little trickier when compound subjects are used or when phrases appear in between subjects and verbs.

Task 4

Can you correct these common agreement errors? Rewrite the sentences in your notebook.

1. Neither George nor Lisa are home.
2. The referee and the players is waiting for the rain to pass.
3. He and his sister is at the front desk.
4. Nobody are going to work today because it's a holiday.
5. There is bananas in the fridge.

Common Writing Errors and Mistakes cont.

D. Comma Splices (Run-On Sentences)

A comma can't be used to separate two complete thoughts. There are three ways to fix a comma splice:

- **Add a conjunction**
such as "and" or "although."
- **Turn one sentence into two**
with a period.
- **Use a semicolon**
to separate the two complete thoughts. When using a semicolon, the sentences should be closely related and very short.

E. Formatting

Spelling:

One piece of writing should use a single spelling convention, such as American English or British English.

Spacing:

Spacing after headings and paragraphs should be consistent. A space should not be placed before a comma or period. This is a very common error that English learners make.

Font:

The same size and style of font should be used throughout a paper. The use of quotes, italics, and bold text should be used consistently. Try following a style guide, such as the MLA. You could also look at ESL Library's style guide.

Task 5

Rewrite these sentences without comma splices.

1. It was a delicious dinner, we had steak and salad.
2. The scenery is gorgeous, there are lakes, mountains, and forests to explore.
3. It was a cold night, we almost froze.
4. The project is due on Monday, you should start working on it.

Task 6

Circle the incorrect spacing in the paragraph below.

While we've come to rely on honeybees for our food supply, these pollinators have been dropping like flies since the late 1990 s. The mysterious phenomenon of the disappearing honeybee is known as Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). Even though bee colonies can be replaced by commercial beekeepers, it is a very expensive procedure . When colonies are lost year after year , beekeepers are unable to keep up with the demand.

Common Writing Errors and Mistakes cont.

F. Formality and Tone

The tone of the writing should be consistent. If an essay is written from the third-person perspective, it should remain in that voice throughout. If a document is written in a formal tone, it should not break away with a personal anecdote from a first-person perspective.

G. Capitalization

Incorrect capitalization is one of the most common mistakes English learners make in their writing. Here are four things to remember:

- The first word in a sentence must be capitalized.
- The pronoun "I" must always be capitalized.
- Proper nouns must be capitalized. This includes languages and nationalities like "English" and "American."
- Important words in a heading or title should also be capitalized.

Task 7

Which sentence does not belong in the paragraph below?

Bee experts don't know exactly what is causing the rapid decline of honeybees, but most agree that chemicals are largely to blame. The use of pesticides has increased dramatically in recent years. I never use pesticides in my garden! Climate change is another suspect. Extreme weather such as drought can make it difficult for bees to do their job.

Task 8

Circle all of the words that should be capitalized in the text below. Circle any of the words that are incorrectly capitalized as well.

1. my Dog Leah likes eating lucky charms cereal.
2. When i am 18, I am going to visit italy and australia.
3. The Sunset looked so nice on tuesday. Did You see it?
4. Next Year i am going to learn french.
5. When i finished reading the harry potter books, I cried.

What to Look for as a Proofreader

A. Typos

A typo is a mistake you make while typing. Typos can be difficult for the writer to catch because a writer’s mind thinks the words have been typed correctly. When you are proofreading someone else’s work, watch out for unnecessary apostrophes (your/you’re), missing apostrophes, missing words, and repeated words.

B. Spelling Mistakes

Do your classmates use digital spell-checkers? A spell-checker is handy, but it won’t catch every mistake (e.g., desert /dessert). Homophones such as “it’s” and “its” are very problematic for writers! You may know the difference between these similarly spelled words, but you may still type them incorrectly.

If you’re checking work that is written with a pen and paper, make sure to keep a dictionary handy. Look up any word that seems wrong, especially if it has double letters.

C. Formatting Problems

As a proofreader, it’s your job to look for formatting inconsistencies and problems, including improper spacing and capitalization. A space should never go before a punctuation mark. Paragraphs should be spaced out properly. Proper nouns and headings should use capitalization correctly.

Tip:

READING OUT LOUD

The next time you read through your own writing or a peer’s writing, read it out loud to yourself. You are more likely to catch mistakes and errors if you read it out loud than if you read it silently. Tiny missing words like “a” or “the” will stand out when you hear them spoken. This is also a great way to catch any mistakes that you have inadvertently introduced during the proofreading stage. Proofreading in a quiet place with no distractions is important. Try recording your voice as you read it out loud and listening to it after. Does anything sound unnatural?

Task 9

Survey your classmates to find out which words they have trouble spelling. Make a class list called “Our Commonly Misspelled Words” and post it in your classroom.

Our Commonly Misspelled Words

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 10. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 11. _____ |
| 6. _____ | 12. _____ |

Comprehension Check-In

Work with a partner and answer the following questions based on the lesson so far.

1. What is the difference between an editor and a proofreader?
2. Why is it important to get someone to proofread your final copy?
3. How can you fix a comma splice?
4. What error do many writers make when it comes to leaving spaces around punctuation?
5. What should a proofreader do when reading the final copy of a written work?
6. Why does this lesson mention the word “dessert”?

Writing Challenge A Checklist

PROOFREAD EACH OTHER'S PARAGRAPHS

Find a partner and exchange the text that you wrote in Task 1 on page 2. Use the symbols in the Writing Correction Key on page 7 to proofread each other's writing. You could also choose a different piece of writing for this activity.

Keep in mind that if you are working with another English learner, some of his or her editing suggestions may not be correct. Work together to polish the text. You can also ask your teacher for help.

BEFORE YOU HAND THE FINAL COPY BACK TO THE WRITER

- Did you run the document through a spell-check program?
- Did you check all apostrophes?
- Did you check for proper spacing around punctuation marks?
- Is the tone consistent?
- Did you read the text out loud in a quiet place?
- Did you check the capitalization?
- Is the font consistent in the headings and titles?
- Does every sentence have an independent clause?
- Are commas used properly?
- Does the writer's name appear on the document?