Proofreading Tips

Proofreading means examining your text carefully to find and correct typographical errors and mistakes in grammar, style, and spelling. Here are some tips to help you proofread successfully:

Get the main aspects of your text right first. Don't make corrections at the sentence and word level if you still need to work on the focus, organization, and development of the whole paper, of sections, or of paragraphs.

Set your text aside for a while (a day, a week) between writing and proofreading. Taking a break from the text will help you to see mistakes more easily.

Use the feedback from previous pieces of work to help you work out what to look for when proof reading. If your feedback says you have made frequent spelling mistakes or that your use of 'however' is incorrect or that you misuse capital letters, then look for these errors when proof reading.

Proofread from a hard copy printout as well as on screen because it helps you see the text in a different way.

Read out loud. This is especially helpful for spotting run-on sentences, but you'll also hear other problems that you may not see when reading silently.

Cover up the lines below the one you're reading using a blank sheet of paper. This technique keeps you from skipping ahead of possible mistakes.

Use the search function of the computer to find mistakes you commonly make e.g. search for "its," for instance, if you confuse "its" and "it's"

Check for each kind of error, moving from the most to the least important, and following whatever technique works best for you to identify that kind of mistake.

Read through once (backwards, sentence by sentence) to check for fragments; read through again (forward) to be sure subjects and verbs agree, and again (perhaps using a computer search for "this," "it," and "they") to trace pronouns to antecedents.

End with a spelling check using a computer spelling checker or reading backwards word by word. Remember that a spelling checker won't catch mistakes with homonyms, e.g. "they're," "their," "there") or certain typos (like "he" for "the").