
Proofreading and Formatting

The final step that you'll want to take before submitting your paper is to make sure that the grammar, spelling, and punctuation throughout the paper are correct and that you've formatted it appropriately. These details may seem frustratingly minor, but errors often cause readers to grow impatient with otherwise well-written essays. So be sure to take the time to carefully *proofread* your essay.

When you proofread, you need to slow down your reading, allowing your eye to focus on every word, every phrase of your paper. Reading aloud can help you slow down, pointing your attention to errors that have gone

unseen. Look for common errors—like pronoun agreement, spelling errors, subject–verb agreement, *its/it's* confusion, *their/there* confusion, and so on—as you read. If you have time, get the opinion of a second reader. Treat the proofreading stage as you would a word search or sudoku puzzle—as a puzzle to be solved. No doubt, some errors are lurking in your prose (even professional writers find errors when they proofread their own work). It should be your mission to find them and root them out.

You'll also want to format the paper correctly. Some instructors provide explicit directions about constructing a title page, choosing a font, setting margins, paginating, footnoting, and so on. Be sure to follow these instructions carefully. If the instructor does not provide directions, consult the *MLA* (Modern Language Association) *Handbook*—the standard reference for writers in the humanities—for specific advice. Instructors appreciate papers that are not only well written, but also beautifully presented.