Proofreading Techniques

GET A FRESH PERSPECTIVE:

- Take a break (as little as five minutes) between writing and proofreading.
- Ask someone to read the paper to you, or read the paper to someone else.
- Read the paper into a tape recorder; play back tape while you follow along.
- Listen for
    - ➢ places where what is read differs from what is written
    - ➢ places where the reader stumbles for any reason
    - ➢ places where the listener gets distracted, confused or bored

SLOW DOWN:

- Cover your writing with a ruler or scratch paper so you can see only one line of text at a time.
- Read backward, sentence by sentence (for unclear sentence structure, redundancy).
- Read backward, word by word (for typos and spelling mistakes).
- Point at every word as you read each word aloud.
- Circle verbs (helps you locate passive voice, "strong" verbs, tense shifts).
- Circle prepositions (helps you locate unnecessary wordiness).
- (For citations) Point at punctuation marks as you name each piece of the citation aloud.
    "Last name comma year. Date colon page numbers."

PERSONALIZE THE PROCESS:

- Create an "editing checklist" of mistakes you commonly make.
- Read through paper several times, looking for a different potential problem each time
    (pronoun/antecedent, verb tense, passive voice, to/too/two, etc.)
- Keep the checklist for use on subsequent papers. Update the list every time a paper is returned.

USE A COMPUTER:

- Print a draft designed especially for proofreading.
- Put in extra "hard returns" so that each sentence starts on a new line.
- Use 14 point or larger type.
- Use find/replace function for items on your editing checklist, including wordiness flags ("to be" verbs, prepositions, etc.) and typos (from/form, extra spaces after period, unnecessary commas, etc.).
- Use spell check and grammar check software. Be aware that these programs are never foolproof—they'll flag some items which are perfectly fine and ignore others which are serious problems—so you still need to proofread on your own. But "checker" software can give you a head start.

(over)

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These proofreading techniques (below) can help you locate different kinds of problems (right).	Spelling	Word Choice	Incorrect Citation Format	Verb Tense Problems	Subj.-Verb Agreement	Pronoun Agreement	Misplaced Modifiers	Sentence Fragments	Comma Splices	General Punct. Problems	Wordiness	Linear Coherence ("Flow")	Paragraph Structure	Support of Ideas	Overall Organizing Method	Thesis
Take a break before proofreading.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Print a proofreading draft with extra space in margins and between sentences.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Create a personalized editing checklist based on your previous writing.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Read paper more than once, looking for different problems each time.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Read aloud to someone else.		X		X	X	X	X				X	X		X	X	X
Have someone read aloud while you follow along.	X	X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Physically cover up all but the line you're reading.	X	X	X							X						
Read backwards, word by word.	X															
Read backwards, sentence by sentence.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X						
Point at words as you read them aloud to yourself.	X	X														
Circle all verbs, then check for tense, agreement, voice, mood, etc.				X	X		X	X	X							
Circle prepositions, then check for clarity. If possible, reword to eliminate prepositions.							X				X					
Circle commas, then check to see if they are correctly used.								X	X	X						
Point at and name punctuation as you read.			X					X	X	X						
Use find/replace function to search for likely misspellings or wrong words (e.g., their/there).	X	X														
Use spell check software. (Warning: This software won't catch all errors.)	X															
Use grammar check software. (Warning: This software won't catch all errors and is frequently incorrect.)	X	X		X	X			X	X	X	X					