# Proofreading your work

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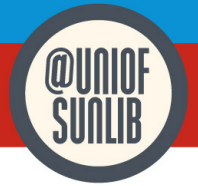
Proofreading a document is not the same as giving it a 'quick check'. Done properly, it is something you will need to allow time for when planning your work. As a guide you should allow at least one hour per thousand words and give yourself regular breaks.

Begin by printing your work onto paper as reading on screen is slower and less efficient. In particular with an essay*, check that:

- it has a title page
- your name or identifier is printed in the appropriate place
- the font type and size used for headings and body text is consistent throughout
- the margins are consistent and not too wide or too narrow
- line spacing is consistent
- there is twice as much space between paragraphs as there is between lines of text e.g. 1.5 line spaces means 3 line spaces between paragraphs
- the pages are numbered.

*module guides often specify exactly how an essay should be set out (formatted).

When you are satisfied with how the text appears on the page you can concentrate on words and sentences. At this point you may find it helpful to use a card to hide the text beneath the line you are reading so you can stay focussed on the visible words. In addition, it is recommended to:

**Read the text aloud if you can**
Until you have become quite good at proofreading, you are more likely to 'hear' mistakes than see them.

**Check your sentences make sense and are grammatically correct.**
Even students who have not been formally taught English grammar should be able to pick out obvious mistakes such as poor subject and verb agreements.

**Example**    *There are many questions* **OR** *There is one question* **NOT** *There is many questions.*

**Are there any spelling mistakes?**
You can use the spellchecker in WORD to assist you but you may need to check specific words and specialist phrases carefully.

## Is it clear what you mean?
Pronouns are a common problem (words such as they, their, those, he, she, it). Is it clear to who or what these words refer to?

**Example**

*Teachers should let parents know if their children behave like this in school. They may even need to take special measures if it gets worse.*

*Who or what do the words 'this' 'they' and 'it' refer to? If it is not clear you may need to rewrite the sentences:*

Teachers should let parents know if their children behave badly in school. The head may even need to take special measures if behaviour problems increase.

## Have you gone over the word limit?
Check that all your words and sentences are relevant. You may be able to summarise long, rambling sentences (what your tutor may call waffle) or delete unnecessary words. Here are some common phrases where the word in brackets is not required:

- (end) result
- the reason is (because)
- (rough) estimate
- (regular) routine

- surrounded (on all sides)
- (added) bonus
- (past) history
- write (down)

## Have you been consistent with capitals, hyphens and abbreviations?
There may be conventions and style guides in your module handbook, but if in doubt, adopt a style and stick to it.

**Examples**

- The BBC or the B.B.C.
- National Curriculum or national curriculum
- Internet or internet

- Email, e-mail or email
- the web, the Web
- Doctor Lee or Dr Lee

## Does it flow?
Each sentence in a paragraph should follow logically from the one before, in other words there should be a clear link between them. In the same way, each paragraph (idea) should be linked to the one before. Sometimes this link is obvious but if is not, you must make the connection clear to the reader.

**Example**

An essay on 'study skills' might contain paragraphs on writing essays, reading and note taking. However, if you wanted to include a paragraph on 'fitness' you would need to make clear the connection between that 'idea' and 'study skills' as it may not be obvious to the reader.

**In general, check that you have**

- used an academic, formal tone
- avoided slang or familiar language
- explained technical terms
- balanced your points
- used an appropriate referencing style