

# BEST PROOFREADING CHEAT SHEET

“When your story is ready for rewrite, cut it to the bone. Get rid of every ounce of excess fat. This is going to hurt; revising a story down to the bare essentials is always a little like murdering children, but it must be done.” - **Stephen King**

Proofreading your writing helps you end up with a good quality, final document that’s error-free, easily readable, and professional.

But remember this: for you to effectively proofread your work, you must first edit your writing.

“The first draft is just you telling yourself the story.” - **Terry Pratchett**

And another thing: there are secrets to help you proofread effectively. Read them next:

## EFFECTIVE TIPS WHEN PROOFREADING

“Those who write clearly have readers; those who write obscurely have commentators.” - **Albert Camus**

- Step away from your document for a while then, come back with a fresh eye to proofread.
- Print a hard copy proof of your document. It is easier to read.
- Align with company style standards while proofreading.
- Proofread for one error at a time. We’ll point out all the errors you need to look out for shortly. Keep reading.
- Proofread in a distraction-free space.  
[Learn how to deal with distractions.](#)
- Read each word aloud and slowly. Verify each word and punctuation mark.
- Break the text into manageable chunks. It’ll prevent you from feeling overwhelmed. And you’ll concentrate on each section effectively.
- Read your writing back to front to spot errors easily.
- Get a friend, a colleague, or a virtual assistant to review your writing.
- Note the errors you frequently make and improve your mistakes over time.

Equipped with these handy tips, you are now ready to proofread effectively.

LET’S GET STARTED!

# HOW TO PROOFREAD STYLE?

- Write an attention-grabbing headline. The primary purpose of the headline is to get the first sentence read. Therefore, your headline unique, ultra-specific, useful, and convey a sense of urgency.

“On average, five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy. When you have written you headline, you have spent eighty cents out of your dollar.”

- David Ogilvy, Confessions of an Advertising Man, 1963

- Pick the right topic scope. Neither too narrow nor too broad. Either, there will be too little to write about or you'll end up pulling in different directions and risk confusing your readers.
- Write a complete and well thought-out outline to avoid an article with poor flow.
- Write an interesting introduction. A great introductory paragraph can start with an emotional appeal, a playful joke, a brilliant opening line, a question, an intriguing fact, or an anecdote.
- Write your article body in a persuasive and coherent manner. Best achieved by stepping out of your shoes and taking things from your reader's point of view.
- Write each sentence with clarity. Make it easy to understand.
- Write article paragraphs that flow together nicely and make sense. Use short paragraphs. Break ideas into small chunks.
- Correct abrupt shifts and awkward transitions. Sentences and paragraphs should connect clearly and transition effectively from one idea to another.
- Replace weak verbs with strong action verbs and instantly supercharge your writing.

- Make the writing economical and succinct. Shorten some sentences to make them more effective. Don't waste words.
- Replace passive voice with active voice
- Use specific concrete nouns more often than abstract words and ideas. Use vivid concrete images to illustrate.
- Use the appropriate writing tone. Formal or casual? Your word choice and tone should appeal to your intended audience's gender, age, social status, lifecycle, occupation, income and generation.

“If you want to create messages that resonate with your audience, you need to know what they care about.”

- Nate Elliott, Marketing Technology Advisor

- Don't repeat yourself. Each sentence should have something new and important.
- Say exactly what you want to say in each sentence. Don't settle for something close.
- Like a rickety bridge, any poor connections should be further supported.
- Use direct quotes and paraphrases effectively.
- Write interesting and creative sentences. Most of them should be striking and memorable.
- Write a powerful conclusion. Otherwise, if you do a lame conclusion, your whole piece falls flat. Learn how to write a tempting conclusion and end your story powerfully.
- Write a clear and engaging call to action (CTA). Get your desired customers hook, line, and sinker.
- Vary the length and structure of the sentences. Sometimes, it's okay to have a one-sentence paragraph or a single word paragraph.

“So write with a combination of short, medium, and long sentences. Create a sound that pleases the reader's ear. Don't just write words. Write music.”

- Gary Provost, 100 Ways to Improve Your Writing. Mentor, 1985

# HOW TO PROOFREAD WORD CHOICE (DICTION)?

“Don’t tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.” - **Anton Chekhov**

- Vary your vocabulary. If you have repeated a word more than three times, switch it up with another word that has the same meaning. Use an [online thesaurus](#).

- Replace any of the words you’ve used with clearer, more precise, and vivid words.
- Know the exact [definition](#) and [connotations](#) of the words you use. Don’t miscommunicate your ideas to your audience.
- Delete words meant to be deleted and fill in the words meant to be included.
- Avoid technical jargon and slang that may be unfamiliar to your readers. If you must use jargon, explain it.
- Avoid clichés and bland overused expressions.
- Eliminate all unnecessary adjectives and adverbs.

## HOW TO PROOFREAD GRAMMAR USAGE?

- Use an [automated spell-checker](#). Know when to accept changes and when to ignore them - the computer is not always correct.
- Next, read out the article and fix anything the spell checker may have missed.
- Quadruple-check important parts of the document. Don’t get caught misspelling words in the title, introduction, conclusion or call-to-action (and everything in between).
- [Fix comma splices/run-ons and fused sentences](#) - compound sentences that aren’t properly punctuated.
- [Fix accidental sentence fragments](#). Each sentence needs a subject, a verb, and a complete thought to meet true sentence hood.
- Use proper and consistent verb tense in sentences. Slipping between past and present tense is very upsetting to the reader.
- [Make verbs agree with their subjects](#).
- All your antecedents (words that replace pronouns) should be clear. [Your pronouns should agree with their antecedents in number](#).
- Place all modifying words, phrases, and clauses correctly. Ask yourself “Do they clearly modify the word or phrase they are supposed to?”

- Confirm [proper use of its and "it's"](#) throughout the article.
- Sprinkle contractions where appropriate. Contractions make your writing seem friendly and more conversational.
- Put apostrophes on all possessives other than person pronouns like "its".
- Check that quotation marks haven't been included mistakenly in set-off quotations.
- Get rid of redundant words and phrases ([fluff or clutter](#)). These words drag your writing, making it appear dull and boring.
- [Revise homophones](#) - words with identical pronunciation but with different meanings. For example, four, for; bread, bred; sweet, suite, etc.
- [Fix faulty parallelism](#). Ideally, parallelism helps you communicate more clearly.
- Use hyphens, en dashes, and em dashes appropriately. The hyphen is used to create compound words, the en dash indicates a range, and the em dash is used to break up sentences.
- Spell all the terms and names consistently throughout your writing.
- Use a consistent format when [writing numbers](#), dates, times, percentages, equations, etc. Either spell out the numbers or use spell figures.
- Introduce all acronyms (abbreviations formed from the initial letters of other words and pronounced as a word e.g. NASA) before you use them. Otherwise, you may confuse your readers. Don’t use acronyms in titles.

# HOW TO PROOFREAD MECHANICS AND FORMATTING?

- Revise the document based on the conventions of your version of English. For instance, British English, American English, etc.
- Format the document according to your preferred style guide. This includes margins, headers, paragraphs, spacing, font type and size, etc. It's finicky work, but it's important.
- Fix common typos such as double spacing between words and misspellings.
- End each sentence accordingly. Either with a full stop, a question mark or an exclamation mark.
- Follow the rules for comma use.
- Punctuate and format all your quotations.
- Capitalize properly.
- Avoid unnecessary abbreviations
- Maintain consistency when beginning all new paragraphs. You either indent or skip a line.
- Put paragraph breaks where they should be.
- Be consistent with sentence spacing.
- Maintain a simple and consistent font size. Ideally 10 or 12-point size.
- Add quotations and/or references to support the points you made. Make sure the in-text citations match the ones in the reference page.
- Read the entire document one more time. Does it flow well? How does it look as a whole? Do you need to make any final changes?

## HOW TO PROOFREAD FOR SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION (SEO)

"Google only loves you when everyone else loves you first."  
- **Wendy Piersall**

- Put the Keyword at the start of your H1 title.
- Make sure the [slug](#) is only your target keyword.
- Straighten up your headings hierarchy. The title tag is H1, the next subheading is H2, and the subsequent subheading is H3, and so on.
- Use your exact keyword 2 to 3 times in the text body.
- Use [outbound links](#) within your article. Rule of the thumb, use your common sense and don't be spammy.
- Use [sufficient inbound links](#) within your writing. You don't want to miss out the [link juice](#), do you?
- Click on each hyperlink to test if it is working.
- Careful select relevant media including photos, illustrations, videos, quotes, tweets, infographics, charts, statistics, factoids, photo galleries, testimonials, diagrams, illustrative photographs and more. Make sure the media fits consistently.

"A wisely chose illustration is almost essential to fasten the truth upon the ordinary mind, and no teacher [or writer] can afford to neglect this part of his preparation ." - **Howard Crosby**

## CONCLUSION

"A professional writer is an amateur who didn't quit."  
- **Richard Bach**

And one more thing:

"Read a thousand books, and your words will flow like a river." - **Lisa See**