

## Title:

How to Proofread Like a Professional

## Word Count:

872

## Summary:

Most of us know how to read and write but do we write - right? Naturally, in this case 'right' means properly but in some contexts that might be hard to catch - especially if you've been writing all day. Proofreaders can be expensive but read on for some tips

## Keywords:

business consultant, business coaching, small business management, entrepreneur, increase profits

## Article Body:

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Even as I wrote the title for this article, I got confused. Is "proofread" one word or two? I thought it was two, and my spell checker didn't have a problem with that, but when I double-checked myself with a popular on-line dictionary, I was able to catch my mistake. Proofread is in fact one word, "proof·read v. tr. To read (copy or proof) in order to find errors and mark corrections."

I'm not a grammarian or editor by any stretch of the definition, but I do get some practice through proofreading my own writing as well as my clients. One of the value-added services I include in my business coaching packages is email support where I'll do a quick proofing of my clients' ad copy or important documents. So while I'm not a qualified copy editor/writer, I have noticed some common mistakes that slip past the typical business owner's own proofreading.

Here are a few things I've learned along the way:

1. People will skip over your copy if it's hard to read. The human brain will avoid things that are perceived as difficult. It's that simple. So the most compelling reason to proofread with a fine-tooth comb is this: If you want people to read your copy, you must make it easy.
2. Mistakes stand out more than the good copy that surrounds them. It's sort of like having a large food stain on your shirt. Most people will notice the stain,

maybe even wonder what you had for lunch, and few will notice how lovely your shirt is otherwise.

3. Do it yourself, but also get a second opinion. Most small business owners are tight on cash, so hiring a professional editor (+\$30/hour) isn't always feasible. Ask your coach, your partner, or a friend to read over your materials, particularly if they're going off to a paper & ink printer where mistakes can be costly.

4. Take a break from writing before you proofread. When you're writing, all the content and ideas are already in your head. If you go straight into proofreading, there's a natural bias toward reading your intended meaning into the copy, instead of scanning it for errors.

5. Get it off the computer screen and print it out. This step is essential for printed materials so you can check the actual size & layout for readability. It's also helpful for when you're tired of the glaring screen. Try printing your copy with double spaces and using a colored marker for notations.

6. Spell checking with your computer isn't enough. Many words sound similar but have different meanings, and spell check won't catch it. This is especially true if English is your 2nd language. An accent or slang can be charming when spoken, but can look incompetent when written.

7. Read your copy out loud. This is a great way to double check your sentence structure. If it feels awkward to speak, it's probably just as awkward to read.

8. Choose fonts that are easy to read. For paragraph text, use fonts of at least 10pts. Stick with basic fonts like Arial or Times New Roman that most computers or internet browsers can display properly. If you want to have fun with stylized fonts, save them for your headlines.

9. Keep your alignment tidy. Left alignment is always easy to read. Center alignment looks best for short bits of text, but looks terrible with bulleted lists or long paragraphs. If you want text in the center of the page, but that still looks neat, try using left alignment but then increase the line indent.

10. Use a consistent capitalization style. There are 3 basic capitalization styles: ALL CAPS; no caps; and First Letter Caps. Switching styles within copy looks jumbled and confusing. It's ok to have a different style in the headers vs. the text, but all headers should be the same, just as all text should be the same.

11. Hyphens that result from line breaks should be avoided. Adjust your text box

size, move a graphic, try justifying the alignment, do whatever it takes to get rid of any hyphens that cut words in half because it disrupts flow and makes your copy hard to read.

12. Use bullets, lists, and blank rows for easier reading. Most people skim instead of actually reading every word. Break up your text into bite-size pieces for stronger impact. Another way to make reading easier is to limit your paragraph width to 65 characters/line (about the width of this article.)

13. Punctuation should support your ideas, not distract. Commas are a way to express your thoughts in sets, such as this idea, that idea, and that other idea. Without punctuation what you get is a run on and on and on some more sentence. (See what I mean?) Also, use exclamation points sparingly, if at all. Exclamation points can be tacky!!! Try italics instead.

Most people will forgive the occasional typo, especially with informal communications like email. But if you're trying to make a favorable impression as a way to build your business credibility, do whatever it takes to get your copy proofread first. Remember, it's not just what you say, but how you say it that counts, and that goes double for whatever you put into writing