

FROM THE LEGAL WRITING CLINIC
WRITING TIP OF THE WEEK

PROOFREADING STRATEGIES



When you have finished revising and editing your work, spend some time proofreading. Remember that proofreading is not the same as editing—you should not try to do both at the same time. When you edit, you are revising for style and clarity. **When you proofread, you are looking for mistakes, such as missing words, typographical errors, and incorrect punctuation.** Consider these proofreading strategies:

- **Give yourself a break between editing and proofreading.** Ideally, you should put your paper away for a day before proofreading it, but even 30 minutes can help.
- **Do something different.** For instance, proofread your paper in a different order from the order in which you have been revising it. If you usually work on the first section first, proofread the last section first. Try reading your paper backwards, line for line, from the back to the front. Read it aloud, or try covering everything but the line you are reading with a ruler or paper. If you are a fast reader, slow down.
- **Personalize your proofreading.** Think about the types of errors you tend to make, such as errors in grammar and punctuation or transpositions of certain words. Then read your paper looking only for these types of mistakes.
- **Print out a hard copy.** Looking at the hard copy is different from looking at your computer screen, and you may be able to see mistakes more easily on paper. You should always print out a final document, even if you are submitting it electronically.
- **Use Spellchecker and similar computer tools, but do not rely on them.** Spellchecker will not catch missing words, homonyms such as “hear” for “here,” transpositions such as “statue” for “statute,” or misspellings in capitals-only text such as point headings.

Anne Enquist & Laurel Currie Oates, Just Writing 20-21 (4th ed. 2013); Laurel Currie Oates & Anne Enquist, The Legal Writing Handbook 183-84, 221, 471-72 (5th ed. 2010).