Quick Proofreading Tips

Proofreading means carefully reading your final work to ensure that it is free of misspellings, typographical and small grammatical errors, often called "careless mistakes." Proofreading and correcting these mistakes is the essential final step you must take before handing in any type of writing. **Don't let a good paper, letter, resume or any type of writing suffer because you didn't proofread!**

But proofreading isn't easy. We all make certain errors that cause us a lot of strain and grief. Here are some tricks to help you proofread better.

1. **Slow down!** Because your brain remembers what you meant to write, you have to train your eyes to slow down and read what is actually written. Proofreading requires slowing down your eye movements to see *all* the letters in each word. This is unlike normal reading when our eyes skip across the line and notice only groups of words.
2. **Read out loud.** Or have someone read your paper out loud to you. The object is to listen to what you have written to decide if the paper sounds like you want it to sound. Often our ears find errors that our eyes missed. This is probably the best way to find awkward sentences in your writing.
3. **Focus on each word.** One very helpful way to slow yourself down is to point a pencil or pen at each word as you say it aloud or to yourself.
4. **Read backward.** Don't read left to right as you would normally do because you will soon slip back into a more rapid reading rate. Instead, move backward through each line from right to left. In this way, you won't be caught up in the meaning of the sentences, but will be able to read word to word.
   - To see spelling problems, read back from the end of the paper one word at a time. It's impossible to read for meaning that way.
   - To check homonyms (there/their/they're; it's/its; too/to/two; etc.) read the immediate context-- usually the phrase the word is part of, occasionally the entire clause.
   - To read for typos, read one sentence at a time, from the end of the paper. Look for the most common ones: missing words, repeated words, extra words left during revision, stray punctuation marks.
   - To read for punctuation and grammar, read aloud one sentence at a time, from the end of the paper. It is necessary to hear the sentence to discover whether its structure is faulty or awkward or to notice when punctuation actually inhibits the sense of the sentences. You must trust your ear to do this; the more you do it, the better you get.

Disclaimer: These techniques are by no means fullproof, or fool-proof. There are many problems they will not catch, particularly the conventional uses of commas (they're too complex and changing too rapidly).
-- 19 Nov. 96 Bob Mayberry Proofreading Techniques

5. **Cover up any distraction.** To focus on each word so that you can see it more completely, hold a sheet of paper or a note card under the line being read. This way you won't be distracted by other words on the page.
6. **Watch for patterns of errors.** We all tend to make the same errors over and over throughout a paper and from paper to paper. Try to look for those groups or patterns of errors that occur most frequently in your writing and then look from them one at a time as you proofread your papers.