

Got Business Writing Skills? Proof It!

So you've finished that rush document and you're ready to send it on its way. You've done your research and double-checked your facts. You've made sure your document is readable by leaving lots of white space—top, bottom, left and right margins—to make it more visually appealing to the reader.

Sure, you know you should proofread it, but the client is waiting—it's a rush job, after all—they'll understand if there are a couple of typos or misspelled words, right?

Maybe they will and maybe they won't. Maybe they'll accept it this time, but when it's time to award contracts, they'll think twice about working with a company that does less-than-perfect work. Are you—more important, is your company—willing to take that chance?

Proofreading should be the final step in writing any document, whether it's a 50-page report or a 100-word email. Don't make the mistake of thinking of proofreading as an "extra" step. It's not optional; it's mandatory. If you send a memo (an internal document) with mistakes, you risk damaging your credibility; if you send a document with errors to those outside your company, you damage your company's credibility as well.

Here are some proofreading guidelines:

- Don't rely on Spell Check. Spell Check is okay as a first resort, but not as a last resort. Spell Check only knows if a word is a word; it doesn't distinguish between words that sound alike, but have different meanings; i.e., "there, their, they're"; "its, it's"; "one, won."
- Take a break between writing and proofreading. Proofread with "fresh eyes." If you have the luxury of time, wait 24 hours after you've written the document before proofreading. Most of us don't have that luxury, but waiting even 20 minutes before proofing a document is helpful.
- Always proofread a hard copy. Never try to proofread on your computer screen—when you proofread on the screen, you see what you meant to write. This advice holds for when you're proofreading other writers' documents as well. You're more likely to see mistakes when proofing a hard copy.
- Proofread away from your work space. When you proofread in the same place you have written the document, you are inclined to make the correction as soon as you find the mistake. This will slow you down.
- Always proofread aloud. When you read aloud, you will see mistakes you might overlook while reading silently.

- Get a second pair of eyes to proofread, especially complex documents or documents that will be read by people outside your company. It's easier to find others' mistakes than our own.

It goes without saying that you want everything you write to reflect well upon you and your company. Now proof it!

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