

# A proofreading guide for proofreaders

 By [Hansie Smit](#)

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Today I want to talk about proofreading. If you noticed I spelled the word proofreading correct in the heading above, congratulations, you grasp the basic concept. If you didn't, try to pay close attention to the following.



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## Attention to detail

Assuming the role of proofreader requires attention to minute details such as the spaces on either side of a line, and how many times you can move your eyes from side to side before they hurt. Watching an entire Wimbledon match is an excellent way to strengthen your eye muscles. It is also a great opportunity to procrastinate while your proofreading deadline becomes a bigger problem than it was the previous day.

## Picking up spelling errors

The traditional, and best, technique to pick up spelling errors is to read copy back to front. To read back to front I repeat the mantra, 'just the word, just the word.' Repeating the mantra, 'ohmmm, ohmmm, ohmmm' does not work as there is some discrepancy as to how 'ohmmm' is spelled. Google advises to spell the word with 'as many Ms as is necessary' which is also an accurate guideline on how long one should meditate, but does little to solve the problem. I spell it, 'ohmmm'. One M confuses it with the unit for electrical resistance, Ohm, and two Ms just look silly.

## Taking holidays

Experienced proofreaders contend that the only real vacation a proofreader can take is to travel to a country where the written word is illegible to an English speaker, such as South Korea. In South Korea, a proofreader can completely relax and return to life's simpler pleasures like looking at a flower or finishing a meal.

## On to apostrophes

Nothing takes my mind off the health benefits of fruit juice quicker than 'It's good for you' spelled 'Its good for you.' That's not good for you, it is atrocious. Furthermore, there are no things such as mens' intuition and womens' testosterone. You will, however, find many examples of men's aftershave and women's magazines.

## Spelling in the States

Worldwide words are spelled the same except in America where certain words are spelled differently because in America they do as they please. In America, you end words with -nse, while British English require an -nce ending. American English uses the -ize ending, whereas in Britain words end with -ise. Try to remember where you are in the world and spell accordingly.

## Ego

Proofreaders are not immune to the trappings of the ego and this may move some to butcher a document with a red pen until it resembles a failed grammar test. Designers don't respond well to being patronised, so try not to do that. Instead, learn how to edit a PDF and indicate gross spelling errors with comments placed on the layout of a design. Try not to write the comments with sarcasm and avoid all caps and exclamation marks.

That's it for today. I left one spelling error in the piece. If you can find it, well done, you're on your way to becoming a competent proofreader. If you can't, switch on Word's spelling and grammar function and find it that way.

## ABOUT HANSIE SMIT

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